

Material change inspection report

19 March 2026

The Shires

Shires Lane

Stretton

Rutland

LE15 7GT

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’.

Inspection outcome

The school has submitted a material change request to increase its capacity from 32 to 60 pupils.

The school is likely to meet the relevant Independent School Standards if the material change is implemented. It is recommended that the material change be approved.

Inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

ISSR paragraphs 7(a), 7(b), 11, 12, 14, 16(a) and 16(b)

1. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures are aligned with statutory requirements. A secure culture of safeguarding is evident throughout the school. This is underpinned by a commitment to ensuring that pupils feel safe and confident in expressing their feelings and any worries or concerns they may have.
2. Pupils benefit from access to a wide range of communication methods and from the consistent presence of key staff. Staff know pupils well and are alert to any changes in behaviour that might indicate a concern. Pupils readily identify trusted adults whom they can approach for support and guidance. Support for pupils' mental wellbeing is well established, particularly through the school's therapeutic provision, which offers targeted and responsive strategies to meet individual needs. The safeguarding team liaises closely and effectively with care home managers and social workers.
3. Pupils are not permitted to use mobile phones during the school day, which reduces opportunities for inappropriate access or communication. Leaders take suitable and timely action when concerns arise regarding communication outside of school. Through the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum, pupils develop an understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when online.
4. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are appropriately trained and have sufficient time to fulfil their responsibilities. They work cohesively as a team and take full account of the school's context and pupils' additional needs. Leaders work effectively with a wide range of external agencies, including social services, the police, and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Suitable plans are in place to extend the safeguarding team and the role of family liaison, should the number of pupils increase.
5. The proprietor, leaders and staff receive extensive safeguarding training. Leaders use regular updates, briefings and quizzes to check staff knowledge and understanding. Induction procedures for new staff are thorough and include clear guidance on safeguarding, behaviour, the staff code of conduct, whistleblowing policies and the process for contacting the safeguarding team. Staff are clear about the actions they should take when concerns about pupils arise. Staff understand the importance of recognising and reporting low-level concerns about adults' conduct. These concerns are recorded and addressed promptly and appropriately, including providing additional support and training where required.
6. Safeguarding records are secure, detailed and precise. They outline clearly the rationale for decisions made, as well as how concerns have been followed up and resolved. Leaders make effective use of these records for monitoring purposes, including identifying patterns of behaviour and evaluating the impact of actions taken. Records of physical intervention are comprehensive. Such interventions

are used only as a last resort. Incidents of physical intervention are reported to governors and reviewed to inform future practice.

7. The school employs appropriate internet filtering and monitoring software across its online systems. Leaders respond swiftly to any instances of inappropriate internet use. Systems are regularly reviewed and outcomes are reported to governors to ensure continued oversight and effectiveness.
8. The school has a suitable health and safety policy, supported by clear procedures that are implemented consistently across the site. Required checks, including those relating to water hygiene, electrical equipment and the physical environment, are carried out at appropriate intervals and recorded systematically. Staff understand their responsibilities in promoting a safe environment. They report any issues promptly and concerns are dealt with swiftly.
9. The school's fire risk policy is implemented effectively. Comprehensive fire risk assessments are in place, including for the premises allocated for increased pupil numbers. These are reviewed regularly and any required actions are addressed promptly. Routine checks of alarms, emergency lighting and firefighting equipment are carried out at appropriate intervals and recorded diligently. Fire evacuation procedures are practised regularly, including ensuring that pupils understand and respond to an alarm without delay. Trained fire marshals provide additional oversight during evacuations, ensuring that procedures are followed and that all areas are cleared safely.
10. Staffing levels are carefully planned to meet pupils' needs throughout the school day, including before and after school and during recreation periods. Staff provide consistent, supportive and caring supervision, ensuring that pupils are safe and able to access help whenever it is needed. Leaders liaise effectively with the local authority regarding transport arrangements, ensuring that supervision levels are appropriate.
11. Leaders implement an appropriate risk assessment policy. Risk assessments in relation to trips, the premises and health and safety are comprehensive. They are reviewed regularly by leaders in order to identify emerging patterns, inform planning and ensure that the environment, activities and routines are safe and well managed. Comprehensive risk assessments are in place for each pupil. These are detailed and reviewed regularly. Staff use these assessments effectively to guide their practice and to ensure that they respond promptly and appropriately to pupils' emerging needs.
12. The proprietor and leaders have given careful consideration to potential risks associated with the planned increase in pupil numbers. Detailed plans are in place to ensure that educational provision, staffing, space, supervision and resources remain appropriate as the school grows.
13. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

ISSR paragraphs 18, 19, 20 and 21

14. Robust procedures ensure that all required pre-employment checks are completed before staff begin work at the school. These checks are recorded accurately and consistently on the single central record of appointments, which is reviewed regularly by leaders and those responsible for governance to ensure ongoing compliance.
15. Those involved in recruitment are suitably trained. Records demonstrate a clear and systematic approach to recruitment that prioritises pupils' safety and wellbeing. Suitable plans are in place to recruit appropriate staff should the school's capacity increase.
16. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

ISSR paragraphs 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29

17. The school building has been refurbished to a high standard. Suitable toilet, washing and changing facilities are provided for the sole use of pupils. Suitable and sufficient facilities are in place to accommodate the increase in pupil numbers requested.
18. The school provides suitable accommodation for medical treatment and the short-term care of pupils who become unwell during the school day. Facilities are sufficient to support pupils with a range of needs, including those with complex medical conditions. Staff responsible for medical care are suitably trained, ensuring that pupils receive prompt attention, when necessary. Staff maintain accurate records and keep parents and carers informed as required.
19. Leaders have carefully considered the design of the premises and facilities in order to meet pupils' additional needs. Classrooms and shared spaces are organised to promote calm, purposeful learning, with careful consideration given to lighting and acoustics. Corridors and outdoor areas are clearly defined, uncluttered, secure and accessible. This enables pupils to move safely and confidently around the site. Adaptations, such as visual cues and the provision of sensory areas, further enhance accessibility.
20. The school provides suitable drinking water that is readily accessible to pupils throughout the day, with all cold-water outlets intended for drinking clearly labelled. Water temperatures at the point of use are controlled effectively, so that hot water does not present a scalding risk. Regular testing and monitoring are carried out to ensure continued safety.
21. Outdoor space across the site is suitable and well maintained, offering pupils safe and engaging opportunities for active play, structured games and social interaction. Designated garden areas enhance the provision, enabling pupils to participate in planting and outdoor learning activities. These spaces provide a balanced range of opportunities for recreation, exercise and exploration.
22. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

Part 6. Provision of information

ISSR paragraph 32(1)(c)

23. The school provides parents with information relating to safeguarding by publishing its safeguarding policy on the school's website.
24. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

Part 8. Quality of leadership and management of schools

ISSR paragraph 34

25. The proprietor ensures that leaders have the knowledge, skills and capacity required so that the Standards are met consistently and the wellbeing of pupils is promoted effectively. Comprehensive governance arrangements provide clear and detailed oversight of all aspects of the school, enabling leaders to reflect on practice, address emerging issues and drive continuous improvement. High-quality training is provided for all staff, ensuring that they understand their responsibilities and are equipped to implement the school's policies and procedures with confidence and accuracy. This balanced approach of oversight, challenge and collaboration underpins the commitment of the proprietor and leaders to safeguarding and securing positive outcomes for all pupils.

26. The proprietor has supported leaders effectively in planning for the proposed increase in pupil numbers, ensuring that growth is carefully managed over time so that the quality of provision is maintained. Strategic oversight has enabled leaders to assess the implications of expansion on staffing, accommodation, resources and pupils' wellbeing, and to plan appropriate and highly detailed adjustments in advance.
27. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

School details

School	The Shires
Department for Education number	857/6004
Address	The Shires Shires Lane Stretton Rutland LE15 7GT
Phone number	01780 411944
Email address	info@theshires.org.uk
Website	www.strettonshires.co.uk
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Mr Richard Power
Headteacher	Mr Jamie Hill
Age range	11 to 19
Number of pupils	28
Date of previous inspection	27 to 29 February 2024

Information about the school

28. The Shires is an independent, co-educational day school in Stretton, Rutland. The school caters for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including complex needs and autism.
29. All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.
30. The school has identified ten pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
31. The school states that its aims are to follow an integrated therapeutic curriculum designed to help pupils develop the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to: communicate effectively; understand and manage their emotions; develop their social, emotional and mental health; participate fully in society by forming friendships, building supportive relationships and contributing to their local community; and maintain good health and wellbeing, ensuring they access the services and support needed for a healthy adult life.

Purpose of the material change inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection following an application made by the school to the Department for Education to make a material change to the school's provision. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about whether the school is likely to meet the Independent School Standards if the material change is implemented.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

19 March 2026

32. One reporting inspector and an accompanying inspector visited the school for one day.

33. Inspection activities included:

- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school and information available on the school's website
- a tour of the school site to include classrooms and facilities prepared to accommodate the additional pupil numbers
- discussion with the director of education
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils.

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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