School inspection report

9 to 11 September 2025

Shiplake College

Henley-on-Thames

Oxfordshire

RG9 4BW

Contents

Summary of inspection findings

1. Pupils' wellbeing is the consistent focus of leaders' decision-making. Leaders have the skills and knowledge to promote this across the school's provision and to fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the Standards, including the regulations for boarding.

2. Leaders ensure that the key aims of the school are fully embedded and well known to pupils, staff, and parents. Pupils refer naturally to the 'Shiplake Seven' and the school's three core values. Displays, assemblies and teaching across the curriculum reinforce these aims.

3. The school's policies cover all statutory areas appropriately. Leaders review policies and their implementation suitably. When inspection was announced, some policies required details to be updated to reflect the school's current practice fully. This was remedied on inspection.

4. Leaders have planned a balanced curriculum, which includes both academic and more vocational courses, including BTEC Nationals and Cambridge technical qualifications (CTECs). Pupils follow enrichment courses and undertake co-curricular activities which complement their academic studies and extend their range of skills.

5. Teachers have good levels of subject knowledge. They plan lessons effectively, sequencing them appropriately in schemes of work. The school's values, known as the 'Shiplake Seven' are threaded through curriculum plans. However, some lessons do not provide appropriate challenge for all pupils.

6. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. The provision ranges from small group teaching and assistive technology to the use of seating plans and subject clinics. The 'learning development' department monitors progress appropriately using whole-school tracking data.

7. Leaders, teachers and coaches have developed a physical education (PE) curriculum which is inclusive but also allows pupils to reach elite levels of performance. Leaders have shaped this programme so that it supports the mental health of the pupils in addition to developing their physical abilities as they progress through the school. Pupils who participate regularly in sports, such as rowing, are given guidance in balancing their academic, sporting and wider commitments in a way which effectively promotes their wellbeing. This is a significant strength of the school.

8. Leaders of boarding have established a well-managed setting which is comfortable and welcoming. Pupils value the way in which boarding develops their independence alongside their sense of social responsibility.

9. Pupils understand respect as a result of modelling by staff and effective teaching and discussion in assemblies, lessons and form time. They articulate their ideas politely and fluently and discuss them with confidence, showing respect for each other's opinions. They debate issues respectfully within and outside lessons.

10. Leaders have established a robust culture of safeguarding. They are mindful of the particular risks for boarders. Staff training emphasises that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, regardless of role.

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 the management of policies so that they are up to date and fully reflect the school's practice

- increase the consistency of teaching so that all pupils are appropriately challenged.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders have a detailed knowledge of school life and make well-informed decisions to ensure that pupils' wellbeing is prioritised. They have the appropriate knowledge and skills to manage support for all aspects of pupils' wellbeing, from the academic to safeguarding.

12. Leaders of boarding have established a culture where pupils value their house allegiances and feel secure and supported in their routines. They understand the expectations of them and how they can contribute to the workings of their boarding community.

13. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, including those for safeguarding, contributing to multi-agency meetings as required. They inform the local authority when a pupil joins or leaves the school at a non-standard transition point. Details of the reviews of education, health and care plans (EHC plans) and any linked funding are shared appropriately.

14. Leaders have the skills and knowledge to undertake effective self-evaluation. This is wide-ranging, with strategic targets identified in line with the school's aims, such as the development of co-education in the school. Leaders review the progress made towards each target as part of an ongoing process. They respond effectively to any perceived need to change provision.

15. The school's suite of policies covers all statutory areas appropriately. Leaders review policies and their implementation suitably. When the inspection was announced, some policies required details to be updated to reflect fully the school's current practice. This was remedied on inspection.

16. The school provides all required information to parents, mostly by way of its website. This includes clear information about recent and ongoing changes to the school's structures and procedures, such as the reorganisation of houses. Suitably detailed reports inform parents of their child's progress on a half-termly basis.

17. Leaders have a clear understanding of risk. Effective assessment and mitigation of risk are in place for activities within school, for the site and for visits beyond school. Staff receive suitable training to fulfil their responsibilities for risk assessing areas of provision. Leaders have the skills to mitigate risks that are less easily spotted and those associated with the school's situation. They ensure prompt action is taken when a risk is identified. A risk assessment is written and shared appropriately if an individual pupil has a particular vulnerability.

18. School leaders prioritise inclusion and accessibility in their decision-making. The accessibility plan identifies effectively areas for development of the site and for access to the curriculum. Leaders ensure that no teaching discriminates against a pupil. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

19. A suitable complaints policy is in place. All complaints, including those resolved informally, are recorded appropriately and the policy is implemented effectively following published timescales. Trends are monitored, including any which relate to boarding.

20. Governors have the experience to exercise effective oversight of the school's work in meeting the Standards, including the regulations for boarding. They visit the school regularly and talk to staff and pupils. They are well informed about the workings of the school. Presentations by leaders at meetings of the board and governor committees strengthen their ability to monitor leaders' work.

Governors' committees audit documents and assess reports from leaders. They challenge the work of the executive as appropriate.

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

21. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. Leaders have shaped a broad curriculum which covers all the required areas of learning and offers a choice of more vocational courses for subjects such as business, criminology and sport. Pupils follow a course in cyber skills and become secure in their digital proficiency. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is sufficiently flexible to meet particular needs, such as when a pupil with a high level of sporting ability has adjustments made to their academic timetable to accommodate their training programme.

23. Pupils effectively develop their linguistic skills and make good progress with analysing literary texts. Teachers support individual understanding suitably through targeted questioning. Leaders have established a focus across the school on the key words required for each subject and in the most effective lessons teachers model the use of subject specialist vocabulary.

24. Pupils make good progress in acquiring mathematical skills. Pupils apply their knowledge to real world situations, such as suggesting improvements for survey methods or in discussing money management during 'finance week'. Pupils make good progress with practical skills in science because of teachers' careful planning that builds upon pupils' developing abilities. Pupils show inquisitiveness and work well collaboratively in problem-solving and experimental work.

25. As a result of well-planned lessons with effective teaching methods, pupils acquire knowledge and understanding of key concepts and processes in the humanities. Pupils are taught to be critical thinkers and to take a balanced view of an issue in discussions of validity and explorations of contrasting perspectives.

26. Leaders of the performing and creative arts encourage all to take part at their own level. For example, pupils make good progress in art owing to focused teaching that facilitates the pursuit of individual interests, aided by authoritative guidance from teachers.

27. Teachers have high levels of subject knowledge. Most lessons are well planned and effectively delivered. However, some lessons do not provide sufficient challenge for all pupils. In these lessons progress is more limited.

28. Leaders have developed robust systems to track pupils' progress regularly and thoroughly. Pupils typically make good progress from their starting points to GCSE. Leaders have identified some results at A level as a focus for further development. They exercise detailed oversight of the data and are mindful of addressing any patterns associated with subjects or cohorts of pupils. Teachers are well informed about their pupils' prior attainment. Data is effectively utilised to guide curriculum planning. Targeted support is provided when data and assessments indicate the need to reinforce the concepts covered in lessons.

29. Leaders have created an extensive co-curricular programme which affords all pupils a broad range of opportunities to experience new activities from cookery to yoga to mountain biking. Pupils in the sixth form take part in suitable activities, ranging from the performing arts, to sports, to academic societies. Pupils develop their understanding of social interaction and acquire skills effectively through participation in activities. Their commitment to activities is monitored through an online platform and, if needed, individual programmes are put in place for those with extensive commitments.

30. Supportive relationships are evident between teachers and pupils. Pupils also demonstrate mutual respect when contributing to class discussions and listening to their peers' thoughts and ideas, creating positive and productive working environments. Where opportunities for collaboration are provided, pupils work enthusiastically and confidently together.

31. Pupils who have SEND have their needs identified effectively by staff in the learning development department and make good progress. Teachers foster independence alongside providing support. They encourage pupils to explain what sort of support works best for them and to exercise choice when planning how best to work on a subject. This fosters self-advocacy and responsibility and equips pupils who have SEND with strategies and confidence that support their resilience and adaptability.

32. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) have their needs identified early and are supported effectively in their language acquisition through targeted lessons and strategies across the curriculum such as the use of specialist vocabulary lists and visual resources.

33. Leaders of boarding have designed an effective activities programme with elements that are suitable for sixth-form pupils. It integrates with the whole school programme while offering events specifically for boarders. These include social events and off-site visits, ranging from go-karting to visiting local events, such as a 'medieval fayre'.

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

34. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

35. Through modelling and consistency of expectations, leaders have established a school culture where relationships between staff and pupils, as well as between pupils themselves, are constructive, embodying mutual respect, kindness, and inclusivity.

36. The inclusive programme for physical education (PE) is effective, introducing pupils to a range of sports. Teachers prompt pupils to connect their practical learning with its theoretical background, including physiology and bioscience. In this way the school's culture of physical education supports health education, alongside helping pupils understand how to improve their performance, and developing pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence.

37. Leaders have planned and resourced highly effective provision for rowing. Pupils are guided to success in the sport by rigorous training led by committed and highly knowledgeable staff. The programme is open to all pupils regardless of the age at which they join the school, while also supporting success at an elite level. There is a sustained history of success with a large number of pupils reaching national finals. The teamwork and self-discipline involved permeate the school community. Leaders have also recognised the importance of supporting the mental health and general wellbeing of high-achieving athletes across all sports and have increased the options for accessing adult support, should it be needed, to the benefit of all pupils.

38. Leaders ensure that pupils are able to develop their self-esteem and self-knowledge through the establishment of a listening culture across the school. Pupils know that their views are taken seriously. They are provided with numerous opportunities to develop self-confidence, such as when they present ideas and particular interests to their peers through assemblies and form time and as part of special events. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme is effective in enabling pupils to develop their moral sense and understanding of right and wrong through age-appropriate activities, including debating what makes a good person, and exploring different scenarios involving issues such as phone addiction or misinformation.

39. The relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum is comprehensive and well planned so that pupils gain an understanding of key topics including consent and the basis of a healthy relationship. Parents are consulted appropriately about the content of the programme.

40. Leaders encourage the development of pupils' spiritual understanding. All pupils develop an awareness of the major faiths through lessons in theology and philosophy. School chapel is always accessible and is used by pupils for quiet reflection. Pupils help lead services effectively. The chapel wardens, who include pupils of different faiths and none, support pupils in a shared appreciation of the non-material aspects of life, so that pupils talk freely about matters such as their appreciation of their environment and participate in activities to mark major religious festivals.

41. Behaviour is good throughout the school. Pupils have well-developed habits for learning, and they conduct themselves well outside the classroom because of leaders' establishment of clear expectations.

42. Incidents of bullying are rare. Leaders respond promptly and effectively should there be a concern. Pupil ambassadors conduct an annual anti-bullying survey which helps leaders understand if pupils feel safe from bullying in their community and whether additional strategies should be explored.

43. Leaders have designed a suitable range of pupil leadership roles, including prefects, chapel wardens and charity representatives. Pupils receive appropriate training for these roles which give them effective responsibility for engaging with the wider school community. Pupils across the age range work together well.

44. School premises and accommodation are clean, well maintained and meet the needs of learners. Effective systems are in place for any maintenance issues that need to be reported and these are responded to quickly. The management of health and safety, including for the boarding houses, is effective, with suitable monitoring in place. These regular checks are recorded in detail and include a log of 'near misses'. Leaders also make use of external audits to assess health and safety provision.

45. The boarding environment is comfortable and orderly. Houses are kept secure with suitable access and signing-in procedures. Rooms are well appointed and equipped with lockable storage areas. Leaders have increased the provision of spaces for day and boarding pupils to integrate outside lessons to further unify the community.

46. Supervision is comprehensive, effectively covering the wide range of facilities pupils can use at break and lunchtime, including social rooms in their houses. Pupils are aware of areas which are out of bounds.

47. The school keeps detailed and accurate admission and attendance registers. Leaders have ensured that policy and practice have been updated as required by statutory guidance. Staff are rigorous in reporting extended absences to the local authority.

48. Fire safety procedures are appropriate. Fire risk assessments are reviewed regularly. Fire exits, escape routes, fire extinguishers and other equipment are checked weekly by staff and annually by an external provider.

49. Arrangements for unwell or injured pupils are appropriate. Pupils can access the medical centre throughout the day. Staff are alerted to any concerns about a pupil's mental health and are able to respond appropriately. Staff training is up to date and all boarding staff are qualified to administer first aid. The school responds proactively to any anticipated needs, such as providing ground-floor accommodation for pupils with mobility challenges.

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

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

51. Leaders ensure that there are suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their economic understanding. Pupils discuss a range of financial topics such as budgeting and insurance as part of the PSHE programme. Pupils design a business idea in competing for the 'headteacher's business award'. In the 'business trading club', pupils undertake different roles to gain an appreciation of investments and the role of medial analysis.

52. Leaders are effective in promoting pupils' environmental understanding. The pupil-led eco-committee's instigation of a paper tax across departments has raised awareness, and pupils are proud to have helped shape school practices. In tutor time, pupils learn about issues affecting water pollution, the significance of reducing one's meat intake and the importance of recycling.

53. Pupils are well supported by staff as part of an effective careers programme. Focused individual support and timetabled lessons enable older pupils to make informed choices about their academic and professional futures. Appropriate careers education is provided across the age range and particular support is in place at key transition points and when subject choices are made. Pupils benefit from group sessions on personal statements, in addition to individual consultations and support with interview practice.

54. Leaders have established a culture whereby pupils take responsibility for their community. The school council presents pupils with an example of democracy in action. Pupils across the age range work together, respectfully debating realistic proposed changes to the school's provision. Sixth-form pupils attend academic clinics to support their peers in chosen subject areas. This contributes to fostering a wider school ethos of giving support to others.

55. Curriculum leaders provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to explore and discuss British values. Pupils work through scenarios and develop their decision-making skills, building their awareness of democracy and contrasting cultures. Lessons to discuss subjects such as what makes a religion promote pupils' appreciation of the range of belief systems. An introduction to the rule of law allows pupils to gain an effective understanding of legal institutions and their work. As a result, pupils develop a broad understanding of, and respect for other cultures, religions and what it means to be British.

56. Pupils demonstrate mutual respect in line with the aims of the school. This is promoted across the school's provision. Pupils learn respect for all people through presentations in assemblies and activities in form time. In PSHE lessons on gender stereotypes, pupils discuss and challenge a range of contrasting examples of gender bias. They develop an understanding of the legal aspects of identity and advances towards equality. House assemblies celebrate the diversity of the members of a house. As a result, pupils develop an appreciation of the range of human society and key factors shaping identity. Leaders ensure that they are exposed to a broad perspective on society and develop insights into their role within it.

57. Pupil-led assemblies on themes such as Black History Month and International Women's Day help pupils develop their awareness of cultural, political and social issues and encourage them to make positive contributions beyond the school. This is complemented by talks from visiting speakers.

Leaders check the content that any such visitor to the school presents to guard against political or other bias.

58. Leaders develop pupils' understanding of charitable contribution effectively. Pupils vote for house charities and are involved in a range of fundraising activities. Pupils visit a local care home to talk to and sing for the residents, thereby developing their understanding of previous generations. Older pupils work with children from local primary schools in sporting events. Pupils develop effective links with the local community through work with organisations including 'Greener Henley' and a charity distributing food parcels.

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

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

60. Leaders ensure that the culture of safeguarding is robust. They exercise effective management of safeguarding procedures.

61. Training is appropriate. Through a regular safeguarding bulletin and staff briefings, leaders share updated information. New staff are well trained so that they know how to respond to a concern and whom they should contact. Higher level training is in place for leaders with particular responsibility for safeguarding. They understand the contextual factors for safeguarding at the school.

62. Governor oversight is effective. The designated governor visits the school frequently, receives regular reports on matters pertaining to safeguarding and is consulted as required by leaders.

63. Should there be a concern, action is taken quickly in response, following the clear and appropriate safeguarding policy which aligns with the procedures of the local authority. The policy is implemented effectively and revised in response to any changes to statutory guidance.

64. Leaders of safeguarding work effectively with external agencies such as the local authorities in several counties and the police. They understand thresholds and take advice when appropriate.

65. The school's management of low-level concerns is effective. Leaders keep detailed records and take action if appropriate, for example providing further training. Staff understand that sharing a low-level concern, including making a self-referral, is part of keeping everyone safe.

66. Leaders provide numerous avenues for pupils to report concerns, including the use of a dedicated email address. Pupils know who to contact if they have a concern and records show that they report matters appropriately. They know that there is a range of adults to support them, including counsellors and the independent person for boarding.

67. Pupils show a suitable understanding of online safety as a result of effective lessons in computing. They understand the school's policy of there being no mobile phones in school during the main school day, and that suitable procedures are in place to allow boarders to contact home easily. New pupils receive suitable induction in safe computer use.

68. The school's arrangements for internet filtering and monitoring are effective. Leaders receive alerts should anyone attempt to access inappropriate material, and respond promptly to understand the specifics of each case. The internet filtering and monitoring system is subject to frequent testing, thus ensuring that online protection responds to changing situations.

69. Leaders ensure the effective maintenance of a single central record of recruitment checks. All necessary checks are completed before a member of staff begins work at the school. Staff trained in safer recruitment are involved in the interviewing and record-checking for every new appointment. References are routinely verified.

70. Record-keeping for safeguarding is effective. Timelines are clear and detailed. Leaders take appropriate measures to ensure that records are kept confidential and are in line with statutory guidance, with explanations of the action leaders have taken and how they followed up each concern.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

71. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Shiplake College
Department for Education number	931/6050
Registered charity number	309651
Address	Shiplake College Henley-on-Thames Oxfordshire RG9 4BW
Phone number	01189 402455
Email address	info@shiplake.org.uk
Website	www.shiplake.org.uk
Proprietor	Shiplake Court Limited
Chair	Sir David Tanner
Headteacher	Mr Tyrone Howe
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	581
Number of boarding pupils	216
Date of previous inspection	10 May 2022

Information about the school

72. Shiplake College is a co-educational day and boarding school located near Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire. The school is a charity and the governors are trustees.

73. Full, flexi- and weekly boarding are available from Year 9 upwards. Since the previous inspection, the house system has been restructured. Boarders are accommodated in four houses, two for male pupils and two for female pupils, all of which are on the main site. The first female pupils below sixth-form age were admitted to the school in 2023 with a view to the school becoming fully co-educational by 2027.

74. Since the previous inspection a new deputy head (pastoral) and assistant head (pastoral) have been appointed. They took up their posts in September 2023.

75. The school has identified 219 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

76. The school has identified English as an additional language for 22 pupils.

77. The school states its aims are based upon its three core values, namely the 'three Is'- individual, inclusive and inspirational. It aims to encourage its pupils to be curious, open-minded, motivated, reflective, determined, creative and independent.

Inspection details

Inspection dates   9 to 11 September 2025

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

79. 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 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

- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff

- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work

- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

80. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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