

Inspection of ISP School Whitstable

ISP Centre, Regent Street, Whitstable, Kent CT5 1JD

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 September 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Outstanding
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

The school takes care in getting to know pupils prior to their first day at ISP Whitstable. Staff, parents and carers, and pupils work together to ensure that each pupil's needs are known and planned for. This partnership approach is built upon, through supportive communication, throughout pupils' time at the school.

Pupils quickly develop positive and trusting relationships with staff and one another. They are greeted individually and warmly at the start of each day and are supported well to make a smooth transition to morning lessons. The happy atmosphere throughout school reflects pupils' feelings of safety.

Pupils know and learn about the school's special words: 'please, thank you' and 'kindness'. These words help bring the school's ethos to life. Pupils understand that the school has great ambitions for their behaviour and learning.

Initially, many pupils who join the school struggle to regulate their behaviour or to engage with learning consistently well. Movement breaks, adult support and personalised rewards help pupils to refocus and be ready to learn. Weekly trips to the farm enable pupils to practise positive behaviours and social skills in informal settings. Over time, pupils rise to the school's expectations with increasing success.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has a detailed understanding of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Information about each pupil's learning and wider needs is collated into a personalised plan. These plans include information about outcomes being worked towards, support required and approaches that work best for the individual pupil. Targets are woven into each pupil's daily curriculum. Oversight of pupils' progress towards their education, health and care (EHC) plan outcomes is systematic, leading to carefully planned next steps. The school has a profoundly inclusive culture and pupils' SEND needs are met well.

Reading is regarded as a priority. Classes have inviting libraries. Adults routinely share picture books and read engaging texts aloud. Pupils enjoy trips to the local library. They read frequently during the school week. A love of reading is established. However, there is variance in the delivery of the school's chosen phonics programme. The school has not ensured that staff are supported to follow the agreed approach. Some pupils, at the early stages of learning to read, read from books that do not accurately match the sounds that they know. Consequently, some pupils are not supported to become confident, fluent readers as quickly as they should.

The school has developed a broad and age-appropriate curriculum. There is a strong focus on English, mathematics and personal and social development. Topics and international cultural studies offer pupils opportunities to learn widely about history,

geography, diversity, faiths and cultures. During inspection, pupils eagerly spoke about the Stone Age and differences between then and now. The curriculum, and daily learning, is organised so that pupils revisit key learning. New learning builds upon what has gone before. This helps pupils to secure knowledge for the long term.

Staff use questioning and formal assessments to check pupils' learning. In many lessons, learning activities meet pupils' needs well. However, in some subjects, tasks are too complicated for pupils to tackle without extremely high levels of adult support. In some lessons, information is presented in a way that fails to capture pupils' engagement. On such occasions, pupils' learning is limited.

The school manages and responds to pupils' behaviour consistently effectively. There is a focus on routines, so that pupils know what to expect throughout the day. Pupils recover quickly from transgressions in behaviour and are motivated by the rewards that they can earn. Positive and improving behaviours are celebrated in assemblies and through reward trips. Most pupils attend school well.

Pupils' well-being and preparation for successful futures underpins every aspect of the school's work. All pupils engage in off-site activities, promoting skills, such as collaboration and resilience. Trips and visits broaden pupils' experiences of the world. In school, pupils learn widely about friendships and relationships, as well as about keeping safe, equality, the law, diversity and protected characteristics. Pupils are proud of their positions on the school council, offering suggestions to further improve the school and to support the local community. In addition, all pupils are enabled to find and pursue interests through weekly clubs, including performing arts, sports and crafts. Pupils are prepared exceptionally well for their next steps.

The proprietor has effective systems in place, to ensure they know about the strengths of the school and next steps to improve it further. Directors, the local governing body and the school's senior leaders understand their different and complementary roles. Consequently, the school is held to account effectively and statutory obligations are met. The school meets schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The independent school standards ('the standards') are met consistently.

Staff report feeling valued. They readily access training and say that their workload is manageable. Parents are supported extensively. For example, this term, families are invited to a fish and chip supper to discuss e-safety.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school has not ensured that all staff are sufficiently trained to teach phonics and early reading. There is an inconsistent approach to the teaching of phonics and early reading. Not all pupils, at the early stages of learning to read, have books precisely matched to the sounds that they know. Consequently, some pupils at the early stages of learning to read do not catch up as quickly as they should. The school should ensure that all staff are trained in, and implement, the school's agreed approach to phonics and early reading.
- On occasions, individual lessons and learning activities that the school provides are too complicated for pupils to tackle without extensive support. Some lessons also fail to engage pupils well. This does not support pupils to learn or practise their learning effectively. The school should ensure that staff are trained and supported to provide pupils with work that deepens their knowledge over time.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	148557
DfE registration number	886/6162
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10391806
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Integrated Services Programme
Chair	Jo August
Headteacher	Carole Cox
Annual fees (day pupils)	£51,249
Telephone number	01795 523 900
Website	ispschools.org.uk
Email address	whitstable@ispschools.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	29 November to 1 December 2022

Information about this school

The last standard inspection took place on 29 November 2022 to 1 December 2022. A material change inspection was carried out on 12 February 2024.

- In May 2024, the school changed its name from ISP Polar Restart Centre to ISP Whitstable.
- ISP Whitstable is an independent special school for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils have a range of complex and differing needs, including autism spectrum disorder. All have an EHC plan. Many pupils have been out of education for extended periods prior to starting at ISP Whitstable.
- The headteacher is also the headteacher of another school within the ISP school group.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider and no registered alternative provision.
- The school is registered to admit pupils aged seven to sixteen. However, the school currently operates as a key stage 2 provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's provision.

- Inspectors discussed the continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy head of operations and the director of education throughout the inspection. Inspectors also met with the chair, and other representatives, of the school's governing body. In addition, inspectors met with the chief executive and other directors, including those with responsibility for safeguarding and for quality assurance.
- Inspectors also met staff and with a group of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading and English, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to

some pupils reading to a familiar adult. In addition, inspectors looked at pupils' workbooks across the breadth of the curriculum and considered these alongside the school's curriculum plans.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of the school, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and honest culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- A wide range of school policies and documents were examined to provide inspection evidence and to check compliance with the standards. Documents included the school's self-evaluation and development plan, evidence of staff training, governing body meeting minutes, quality assurance visit minutes and the school's extensive checks on health and safety and compliance. Behaviour and attendance records were also scrutinised.
- As part of the checks made on the school's compliance with the standards, the lead inspectors toured the school premises with the headteacher and the head of operations.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text responses.

Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Elaine Parkinson	Ofsted Inspector

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