



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

The Croft Preparatory School

February to March 2023

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School's Details

School	The Croft Preparatory School			
DfE number	937/6016			
Address	The Croft Preparatory School Loxley Road Stratford-upon-Avon Warwickshire CV37 7RL			
Telephone number	01789 293795			
Email address	office@croftschool.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Marcus Cook			
Chair of proprietors	Mrs Lyndall Bagnall nee Thornton			
Proprietor	The Croft School Ltd			
Age range	2 to 11			
School	The Croft Preparatory School			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	378			
	EYFS	87	Years 1 to 6	291
Inspection dates	28 February to 2 March 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 The Croft Preparatory School is an independent co-educational day school. Established in the Old Town area of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1933, it was purchased by the Thornton family in 1981. The school moved to its current site on Alveston Hill, a few miles south of the town centre, in 1986. It is a limited company, with three of the family forming the board of directors. A governing committee has devolved responsibilities for many functions. The school comprises two sections: the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for children aged 3 to 5 years; and Years 1 to 6, for pupils aged 5 to 11 years.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to provide each child with academic challenge and the opportunity to succeed and develop a sense of self-worth, whilst nurturing a lifelong love of learning in a happy and secure environment.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come mainly from a range of professional backgrounds, living within a 15-mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average compared to those taking similar tests nationally. The school has identified 71 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, of whom 40 receive additional specialist support. Two pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. No pupil in the school speaks English as an additional language (EAL). Data used by the school have identified 18 pupils as being the more able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school does not meet all of the required standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 Most arrangements made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils pay due regard to current statutory guidance, with the exception of those relating to some recruitment checks on staff. The required checks against the list of those prohibited from teaching were not made for a small number of peripatetic music and drama teachers before they commenced employment. These checks were completed satisfactorily during the inspection. In a few cases, only one reference for staff was obtained before they commenced employment.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety in paragraphs 9–16, the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 (accessibility plan), and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met, but that in paragraph 7 [safeguarding] is not met.**

Action point 1

The school must ensure that it obtains suitable references before staff commence employment [paragraph 7(a) and (b); EYFS 3.7 and 3.9].

Action point 2

The school must ensure that all staff engaged in teaching work are checked against the list for those prohibited from teaching before they commence employment [paragraph 7(a) and (b); EYFS 3.7 and 3.9].

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors reported under Part 4, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.
- 2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.**

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.
- 2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.**

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.19 The school does not ensure that the leadership and management, including governance, demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards, particularly those relating to safeguarding, are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school in paragraph 34 is not met.

Action point 3

The proprietor must ensure that the leaders and governance demonstrate good skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards, particularly those relating to safeguarding, are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c)].

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils demonstrate outstanding attitudes to learning; they are willing to engage and want to work hard.
- Pupils are very competent communicators; they are active listeners and articulate speakers.
- Pupils have excellent collaborative skills and show willingness to take initiative when given the opportunity.
- Pupils have high levels of knowledge and skills across all areas of learning.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils demonstrate high levels of resilience and willingness to learn from their mistakes.
- Pupils have strong moral values and awareness of right and wrong.
- Pupils show excellent social skills which enable the achievement of common goals.
- Pupils are quietly self-confident and are strongly aware of their own self-worth.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Further challenge the more able pupils so that they extend and deepen their thinking across all subjects.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils of all ages and abilities have outstanding attitudes to learning. Pupils maintain prolonged focus and clearly enjoy participating in activities and discussion. These highly positive attitudes are developed through the many opportunities pupils have to work collaboratively. In a year 4 English lesson, pupils adapted their newspaper headlines and straplines making them more dynamic and interesting based on feedback from their peers. Pupils' ability to take initiative is developed most strongly in lessons where resources allow pupils to select how to respond to tasks and there is an expectation that pupils will work independently to challenge themselves. In art, Year 6 pupils demonstrated strong initiative and independence whilst completing glazing their clay animals. Pupils fully embrace the Croft's school values of respect, importance of positive attitudes, friendship and trust that is firmly embedded in the school culture.
- 3.6 By the time pupils leave the school, all have made at least good and often rapid progress relative to their starting points. This was confirmed by observations of pupils' work in books and in lessons, and by analysis of the school's own assessment data. Pupils' attainment in standardised tests is above the average for pupils taking the same test nationally. Pupils with SEND make rapid progress from their starting points. This is because of the effective individual support that they receive. Pupils are academically well prepared for entry to their future schools, with most leavers gaining places at local grammar and independent schools with competitive entrance criteria. Almost all pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt they were well prepared for senior school.
- 3.7 Pupils achieve effective individual and group success. Many pupils achieve highly in their graded music exams, with a few pupils in recent years achieving scholarships to their selected senior schools. Some pupils have also achieved academic and all-round scholarships, as well as scholarships in the dramatic and creative arts or sports. Pupils have represented the school at a high level with sports teams winning the regional netball competition and qualifying for national finals. The U11 hockey team were Warwickshire champions in the 2022/23 season. Pupils have achieved individual successes, playing at county level in cricket and hockey, and for local football teams. Various pupils represent the school at local horse-riding competitions. The pupils have received recognition for their artwork in the Malvern arts show and by receiving a national arts award.
- 3.8 Pupils have excellent study skills. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire felt the school equips their children with the team working, collaborative and research skills they need in later life. These skills are developed from an early age. The very youngest children answer age-appropriate philosophical questions and justifying their thinking. Children explained that they would rather have two noses than one eye 'so I could smell double'. In a Year 3 geography lesson, pupils were able to hypothesise, at a level well above that expected for their age, about the impact of destructive waves on the coast lines of eastern England. Older pupils analysed rock structure and made assured hypothesis to predict how, by forming smaller cube shapes, rocks may have formed. This enthusiasm for thinking broadly, was stimulated and encouraged by the many geological artifacts in the school's geology museum bequeathed by a former proprietor of the school. Opportunities for pupils to work and think at levels appropriate to their own understanding is embedded in some subjects. However, it is not consistently applied to enable the more able pupils to fully extend and deepen their thinking in their everyday learning experiences in all subjects.
- 3.9 Pupils of all ages demonstrate outstanding knowledge and skills across all areas of the curriculum. EYFS children demonstrate competent observational skills when looking at growing cress seeds. Year 1 pupils applied their confident design and skills to inventing a movable artifact of their own design. Older pupils show sophisticated technological skills when measuring, cutting, drilling to create a hydraulic grabber, whilst also understanding the effect of Pascals' law, in relation to the transference of pressure through fluids. Older pupils have deeply secure language skills. They can read, write and speak French with increasing accuracy explaining which subjects they like and dislike in a school

timetable. Year 6 pupils demonstrate excellent scientific knowledge and skills, understanding the theory of natural selection and explaining why long neck animals such as giraffes survived due to their adaptations. The development of high-level skills and knowledge is because of a series of well-planned lessons and well-chosen engaging activities that enable pupils to feel confident in their learning. Pupils' geographic knowledge and skills are very high for their age. For example, Year 6 pupils accurately use six-figure grid references and interpret contour lines effectively. They also confidently use the skills of a historian, to infer from primary and secondary sources of evidence, about life in Victorian Britain. During hockey and football, Year 5 and 6 pupils show assured levels of physical skills and understanding of defence. Pupils demonstrate their musicality in analysing the theme tune from the *Indiana Jones* films. Pupils' understanding and application of skills are enabled by access to specialist facilities and equipment provided by leaders and governors, and through their teachers' high levels of subject knowledge.

- 3.10 Pupils are skilled communicators. Children in the EYFS have a strong grasp of high frequency words. They listen attentively to the sounds of letters, beginning to write unfamiliar words with increasing accuracy. The more able write sentences with confidence. Children explain why they like books and they read with enjoyment and increasing fluency. All pupils speak with confidence and clarity for their age and older pupils express their ideas and opinions with mature reflection and deep thought. Pupils write accurately for a range of purposes. In year 4 pupils used noun phrases to build engaging and informative newspaper headlines and then improved their work adding alliteration. Year 6 pupils' excellent knowledge of vocabulary is evidenced in this description of the Australian outback as 'a harsh and eerie landscape with parched and arid soil as dry as dust'. Pupils demonstrate excellent communication skills because of the high expectations of staff for progress by all, regardless of their starting point, and because of leaders' focus on developing reading, literacy and language skills. Pupils apply their skills across the curriculum, such as writing poems in geography about tornadoes or making links between the route words from Latin to explain the use of 'therm' during a discussion on global warming. When brainstorming how best to write a short story, Year 6 pupils confidently outlined all the extensive complex writing techniques they knew and explained each one accurately.
- 3.11 Pupils are highly numerate for their age because of the opportunities they are given during mathematics lessons to work at different levels of challenge. EYFS children show developing understanding of mathematical concepts related to quantity, through engagement with well-chosen resources. Nursery children spontaneously incorporated their emerging understanding of number in their creative play, when counting forward and backwards from 1 to 10. In Year 1, pupils of all abilities successfully answer number problems using division and multiplication, applying their strong understanding of the 2, 5 and 10 multiplication tables. Year 4 pupils used integers and improper fractions accurately, with some pupils confidently converting mixed number fractions into improper fractions. The strong mathematical skills of Year 6 pupils enabled them to apply formula to calculate the area of triangles and compound shapes. Pupils apply their mathematical skills effectively to other areas of learning. In Year 5 art, pupils added the weights of fruits that they wished to use to create a healthy drink. In science, pupils accurately use Newton meters to measure the force of different objects and investigate the effect of forces.
- 3.12 Pupils develop highly competent computing skills. EYFS children are highly successful engaging in digital drawing activities, learning about the relationship between letters and sounds and playing number games using their tablets. They can give accurate instructions to make their programmable toys move. Pupils across the school use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively to research and present information. They have competent word processing skills, use computer aided design to create 3D badges, and understand how to use a number of coding programs. Pupils use applications confidently to edit, immerse text and images and create special effects for a promotional video for their school. Year 6 pupils created a web page for their favourite football team with hyperlinks and videos. Pupils use their skills across the curriculum. In Year 1, pupils used devices effectively to reinforce their understanding of multiplication and division. Year 5 pupils used an ICT application to measure brightness, when investigating the effect of voltage on light bulbs. Strong

standards of achievement in these areas result from knowledgeable teaching and the ready availability of suitable resources provided by the proprietors.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils of all ages exhibit excellent levels of self-confidence and resilience. This is because of the profoundly supportive relationships developed between pupils and adults in school. Pupils feel teachers recognise each pupil as an individual and encourage them to be the best they can be. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school helps their child to be confident and independent. The pupils say that they feel they understand their own strengths and weaknesses and are highly confident because they are supported by positive and encouraging feedback from adults and their peers. They answer questions without fear of failure, and flourish as a result. Pupils in Year 6 mathematics lesson, when developing their understanding of how to find the area of a complex compound shape, did not give up. They tried different strategies to finally achieve the intended outcome, embedding the Croft values of resilience. In year 1 swimming lessons pupils were resilient and eager to improve their back stroke legs and arm actions. Collaborative working and resilience enable pupils to improve their own performances in netball matches where pupils led their own warmups and took responsibility for their own preparation. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their lives. The school fully meets its aim for pupils to develop a sense of self-worth.
- 3.15 Pupils have an acute understanding of fairness and of the importance of doing right rather than wrong. They demonstrate clear respect for the expectations and school core values. Older pupils said that they felt that 'Croft' children were well behaved but were also quick to own up when they made mistakes. This is because of the clear school behaviour code which enables pupils to be given a chance to own mistakes. The pupils explained that they felt enabled to take responsibility for behaviour because their teachers listen to them. Younger children find ways to make amends for fallings out in the playground, supported by older pupils who are trained as core values ambassadors. Younger children remind one another of the school rules, to line up correctly and not to run. In a Year 4 personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lesson, pupils showed excellent understanding of ethical frameworks and moral approaches. They knew it would be wrong if someone asked them to do something that made them uncomfortable, for example copying their homework. This high level of understanding about moral values is developed through the curriculum and assembly program.
- 3.16 Pupils are profoundly socially aware and so can work very proficiently with others. EYFS children worked collaboratively playing a game to sound out simple words, so each improved their awareness of the links between letters and sounds. Year 1 pupils cooperated in a large group, labelling a life size drawing with the names of various body parts, taking it in turns to share the space and ideas. In a Year 2 music lesson, pupils exhibited a strong sense of teamwork, the whole class developed a clear understanding of notes B and A. All parents who responded to the questionnaire said that the school helps their child to develop strong teamwork and social skills. Pupils are highly socially aware because of the very many opportunities they have to work practically and with others in lessons and in their forest environment.
- 3.17 Pupils are discerning decision-makers, understanding what impact their choices have on how they learn and their enjoyment of learning. Children in the nursery organise themselves effectively to make their own decisions about their daily needs and routines. For example, they understood the need to wear an overall if tackling a messy activity such as painting or when learning outside. This is because of the opportunities they are given to make their own decisions and to think independently. Year 6 pupils explained how they challenged themselves to add even more complicated ideas to their design for a hydraulic grabber in a technology lesson, because the subject was related to interests they wanted to develop in later life. In a Year 3 art lesson, pupils were able to decide for themselves how they interpreted the work of the artist Keith Haring. The youngest pupils choose who to select to work

with in groups based on if they will work effectively together and not just with people who are friends. Pupils learn to make sensible decisions because they are given many opportunities to do so as part of lesson structure.

- 3.18 Pupils demonstrate a mature spiritual understanding particularly in their appreciation of the different major world faiths. This is because of the opportunities in the religious education curriculum, to visit many different places of worship, to discuss the customs of different faiths and through interaction with visitors from the local community. Older pupils show a strong philosophical awareness of inequality, such as their empathetic reflections on the plight of refugees. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have to pray. They explained that this helps them to reflect and that they value a time to block other things out and to be quiet. Year 5 pupils completed some deeply reflective writing on the meaning of life. Pupils spoke with conviction about the need to be happy rather than rich because of the fulfilment it brings. They explained that the after-school yoga classes increase levels of spiritual health, give them a more positive outlook on life, happiness within, and lower their anxiety levels.
- 3.19 Pupils have a competent understanding of the different cultures represented in their school and the need to respect people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. This strong level of understanding of different cultures is supported through the variety of books in classes which feature stories from different cultures and because of the opportunities to share one another's experiences in class and assemblies. For example, Year 4 pupils gave a thoughtful presentation on Sikh cultural traditions, other children shared how the Seder plate is used in the Jewish culture. When studying Africa, children brought in their own African fabrics to explain the patterns and colours used as part of cultural traditions. High expectations of respect are supported and modelled by staff and are an important part of the school culture and values. Almost all parents felt that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people.
- 3.20 Pupils make excellent contributions to their own community. Year 2 and year 6 pupils serve their table at lunch time and take responsibility for helping to clear the dining hall. All year 6 pupils are highly effective in fulfilling responsibilities to their school family and eagerly take up the opportunities to take different roles. Younger children act as class helpers and pupils in different year groups are voted onto the school council or food committee. Pupils explained that each of these committees have an impact in improving school life, such as by requesting the addition of different types of activities for 'Friday clubs', buying more playground equipment, as requested by pupils, with a budget provided by the school, and making suggestions for different types of food which are now on the school menu. Pupils contribute meaningfully to their local and national communities through visiting a local care home, raising money for national and international charities and by sponsoring the education of a child in Africa.
- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of being safe and healthy. This is because of the extremely strong focus on pupils' emotional and mental health given to the development of all aspects of the school curriculum by the leadership. In PSHE year 2 pupils demonstrate a strong understanding of feelings and emotion, saying that one cannot always have a good feeling all the time. in a PSHE lesson, Year 4 pupils gave a passionate speech on the impact of peer pressure on minds and bodies. Older pupils show high levels of self-regulation. This is because of the focus on teaching children how to recognise and express their emotions and feelings. Pupils are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of bringing in healthy snacks to school and in trying a wider variety of foods. Pupils have an excellent understanding in how to remain safe online, as demonstrated by their contributions to a short film on how to stay safe. Pupils identify many of the factors that might cause anxiety and unhappiness and know where to find support.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Vivien Sergeant	Reporting inspector
Mr Stephen Challoner	Compliance team inspector (Former director of staffing, HMC School)
Mr Stephen Hardy	Team inspector (Head of department, HMC school)
Mr Umeshchandra Raja	Team inspector (Former head, ISA school)