

Summarised inspection findings

Cargilfield School

Independent

12 September 2023

Key contextual information

Cargilfield School is an independent, co-educational preparatory school for children aged three to 13. At the time of inspection, there were 270 learners across the P1 to P3 classes and Form 4 to Form 8 classes. The nursery provision was not included in this inspection of the school. The majority of children live locally in the Edinburgh, Lothians and Scottish Borders areas. The school offers weekly and flexible boarding for children from Form 4 upwards. Many children attend the school from further afield, for example from Fife, Kinross and the Highlands. A few children come from overseas.

The school is a charitable trust, led on a day-to-day basis by the headmaster and senior management team. An experienced Board of Governors (Board) provides strategic direction for the school. The school's curriculum broadly follows Curriculum for Excellence guidelines from P1 to P3. From Form 4 onwards, children are taught by subject specialist teachers. In Form 6 to Form 8, they work towards Common Entrance exams, scholarships and senior schools' own entrance tests.

1.3 Leadership of change

very good

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- Cargilfield School is a nurturing and inclusive school where children make the most of the wide range of enriching opportunities on offer to them. Staff have very high expectations for children's learning and behaviour. All children respond very positively to these expectations. They work hard to achieve their potential and are very polite and respectful in their interactions with staff and other children. The school vision, that 'learning is an everyday adventure' is evident in the exciting and motivating experiences for children. The long-standing school motto, based on the value of kindness, is well understood by all. This year, senior leaders have begun a process to refresh the vision, values and aims to ensure these are relevant to the current school community.
- The skilled and very experienced headmaster has been in post for nine years. He provides highly effective leadership for the school. His positive, open and warm style of engagement is appreciated by children and adults alike. He is highly respected across the school community. He is supported strongly by senior managers, who each carry out their roles with dedication and care. Together, they provide highly effective leadership and very well-judged direction for the staff team. They place high priority on children's wellbeing and individual needs. Almost all parents say that they find senior leaders very approachable, understanding and responsive to any requests or concerns.
- The Board, headmaster and senior leadership team have a clear and shared vision for the future of Cargilfield School. The Board provides very high-quality governance and strategic direction for the school. Led by the dedicated and astute Chair of the Board, governors have developed ambitious business objectives that detail the future plans for the school. These plans include continuing to build on the very successful and popular boarding provision. The Board comprises education, medical, financial and legal professionals who are each highly skilled and respected in their field. They bring a wealth of talent, expertise and rigour to decision making processes. Governors who chair sub-committees, for example for safeguarding, education and welfare, ensure there is robust scrutiny of the school's policies and approaches. They are reflective and evaluative in their roles, providing a careful balance of challenge and support for school leaders. Governors ensure they have a true sense of school experiences for learners through their regular engagement with children, staff and parents.
- Governors and the headmaster are embedding successfully a culture of leadership at all levels in the school. Heads of department monitor continuously the quality of academic standards within their subject areas. They take prompt action where children require some additional support or intervention so that all learners can achieve their potential. An enthusiastic, highly skilled and forward-looking group of teachers are curriculum leaders. Together, they are successfully driving change. They play a key role in identifying the priorities in the school improvement plan. Curriculum leaders have carried out a thorough audit of the curriculum at Cargilfield School. Their work is ensuring there are effective transitions and links in learning

between the nursery, pre-prep and upper stages of the school. They are also leading a well-considered process to developing a cohesive approach to self-evaluation across the various departments. This builds on the very effective practice they have already identified amongst their colleagues. The school has taken a similar, team approach to the leadership of wellbeing, safeguarding and inclusion. The skilled team of staff with responsibility for pastoral care and boarding meets each week to discuss the wellbeing of children and any issues that may arise. As a result, Cargilfield School is very successful in delivering high-quality care and support for children. Curriculum and pastoral leaders feel empowered and that their work is valued by the headmaster and the senior management team. They appreciate the supportive and encouraging approach of senior leaders, and they feel as middle leaders, they can lead and positively influence change.

- Children are developing important leadership skills through a variety of worthwhile ways. At Form 8, children have significant responsibility as heads of school, captains, prefects, chairs of committees and pupil councils, and divisional captains. They carry out their duties responsibly and with pride. Younger children also have leadership opportunities as members of pupil voice groups, such as the boarding committee and the food committee. Staff use children's suggestions to improve aspects of school life. As planned, teachers should continue to extend the roles of pupil councils and committees. Children have the appropriate skills and are ready to lead and conduct their own self-evaluation on whole-school approaches, for example, in learning and teaching.
- Parents play a key role in the success of the school. Each year group is represented by parent representatives who are members of the Friends of Cargilfield group, who raise significant funds for the school. They help to promote the school's approaches to equity by organising the stock of pre-loved school uniforms and supporting local and national charities. In pre-inspection surveys, almost all parents stated they are satisfied with Cargilfield School and that they would recommend the school to others.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- The climate for learning across Cargilfield School is a major strength of the school. The purposeful, respectful, calm, nurturing and inclusive approach ensures that all children achieve very well, and by Form 8, many make excellent progress in their learning. Teachers' high aspirations for children are evident in all aspects of school life and learners enjoy the challenges offered both academically and in extra-curricular activities. Children are polite and respectful towards each other and staff. They enjoy supporting and encouraging each other in all aspects of school life.
- Almost all children contribute effectively to the life of the school through their participation during form time, divisional time and through pupil groups. Most children in Form 8 enjoy and make the most of leadership opportunities. The inclusive nature of the school welcomes all ideas and children are actively encouraged to participate. Moving forward, staff should consider developing their approaches to feeding back to children on the actions taken to improve the school that arise from their suggestions.
- All children take part in an extensive range of outdoor learning experiences. Teachers plan a breadth of relevant activities using the local area very well to support children's learning in a meaningful and purposeful way. All children receive significantly more than two hours of high-quality physical education each week. The school has developed creative approaches to include and motivate all children in physical activity. Staff provide a wide variety of engaging opportunities, including mountain biking, fencing, paddleboarding, orienteering and navigational skills. Children clearly value the opportunity to participate in these activities, as well as more traditional sports such as hockey, cricket and rugby. In addition, almost all children benefit from the opportunity to learn to play at least one musical instrument. They perform at a high level, both individually and with others in school choirs and bands, and within the local community.
- The school provides an impressive range of extra-curricular activities for children of all ages across the school day. These opportunities at break, lunch and after school, enhance the unique Cargilfield School curriculum. Children develop their resilience and independence particularly well through a range of residential experiences. All year groups from P3 upwards enjoy boarding weekends in school, where children play, explore and relax with their classmates. At P3, children have the opportunity to camp overnight in the school grounds, developing their sense of personal responsibility. As children progress through the school, they benefit from taking part in increasingly challenging expeditions. For example, they explore the local area, climb Munros and stay in bothies across Scotland, and participate in ski trips overseas.
- Across the pre-prep and upper school stages, the quality of teaching is very good with a few examples of excellent practice. Children understand clearly the purpose of their learning. They

are motivated to learn and demonstrate a very positive work ethic, striving to achieve their best. Almost all staff create exciting and stimulating lessons that challenge children's thinking. All children work very well as individuals, in pairs and in groups. At every opportunity, staff use high levels of questioning to deepen children's learning and to encourage curiosity. Staff enhance children's learning very well by engaging them in sophisticated discussions and by challenging their thinking processes in highly motivating ways. There is potential for greater use of digital technology to enhance learning further, such as enabling children to choose how to demonstrate their own learning. Children who experience barriers to learning benefit from timely, well-planned interventions in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Specialist staff identify any gaps in children's learning and provide appropriate support.

- In pre-prep, children benefit from specialist teachers in French, music, physical education and art. From Form 4 onwards, children experience a more extensive range of specialist teachers, enabling them to extend their skills, knowledge and experiences. As they progress through the upper stages of Cargilfield School, children benefit from a clearly structured progression of teaching across the curriculum. Teachers provide high quality interactions and learning experiences in all subject areas. These opportunities increase children's motivation and challenge them to achieve very high standards across their learning. Across the school there is a strong ethos of collegiate and positive working relationships amongst staff. Teachers work very well together to ensure that learning is relevant, stimulating and challenging.
- Teachers provide children with a range of helpful oral and written feedback which supports them very well to identify their own next steps in learning. Recent improvements in the school libraries have enhanced further children's enthusiasm to read for pleasure and have provided additional assessment information for staff.
- Teachers use a wide range of formative and summative assessments to monitor progress and plan future learning that meets the needs of all learners. Teachers share information about children's learning and achievements on a regular basis, which supports transition processes across the school. They create regular, detailed reports to track and share progress with children and parents. This consistent sharing of information on prior learning and progress supports continuity in learning across stages. Curriculum leaders have identified the need to streamline teachers' approaches to tracking learning across departments, to avoid duplication of effort.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Overall, children feel safe, happy and well looked after at school. They describe their time at school, including boarding, as a 'home from home'. They engage fully in lessons and out-of-class activities and are confident when working in different teams. The high levels of respect that children and staff show each other means that children are not worried or anxious about sharing answers that may be incorrect. Staff build on all children's responses positively and use these to support and challenge learners. As a result of this positive ethos of encouragement, children enjoy and make the most of their learning., They feel very well supported and participate enthusiastically in lessons and the wider life of the school.
- Children know that their wellbeing is important. They are knowledgeable about different ways to keep themselves safe and healthy and have a very good understanding of the wellbeing indicators. Senior leaders and pastoral staff have begun a process to review and revise the programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE). This has included consulting with parents on the main health and wellbeing topics for each year group. Children enjoy PSHE lessons and feel that topics such as online safety, anti-bullying approaches and healthy eating are relevant to their needs. The majority of children feel that there are good opportunities for them to share their ideas and views about learning about their wellbeing. A minority are not sure to what extent their views contribute to school improvement. Pastoral staff should consider consulting with children more widely as part of their PSHE review processes, to capture learners' views on all topics and resources.
- School staff place high importance on children's emotional and mental health and wellbeing. School nurses and pastoral staff play a very important role in helping to support children who need extra help in managing their emotions and feelings. Pastoral leaders have developed very helpful partnerships with outside agencies and organisations to widen their network of support for children and families. This includes working with a local child counselling service who provide individualised support for children who experiences barriers to learning.
- Children lead particularly active and healthy lifestyles at Cargilfield School. They are very appreciative of the wide variety of clubs and activities offered by staff. They are very positive about the variety of sporting and non-sporting activities they can take part in. This ensures that all children find something that they enjoy doing and feel included in extra-curricular activities. Children feel welcome and part of their school community. The unique format of the school day, which includes longer break times, means that clubs are offered during, as well as at the end of, the school day. All children benefit from having plenty of free time across each day to play, relax and follow their own interests. This results in a calm, happy, family ethos where children can be themselves in a supportive, inclusive environment. Form teachers meet with their year group of children every day, including at lunchtimes, to check on children's wellbeing.

Children identify their Form teacher as a key person that they could turn to if they were upset or needed help.

- Senior leaders have a very good knowledge and understanding of their statutory requirements and codes of practice regarding wellbeing, equality and inclusion. They review school policies on a regular basis and take account of the most recent national guidance. This includes issues such as exclusions and promoting positive relationships, including anti-bullying. Senior leaders consult with governors, staff and parents when considering updates to pastoral policies. A next step will be to include consultation with children more fully as part of these review processes. There are robust governance systems in place to ensure all policies are fair and inclusive.
- Children and families are very well supported throughout key transition points for joining and moving on from Cargilfield School. Children leaving Cargilfield School are very well supported in choosing their new school and preparing for Common Entrance exams. Children in Form 8 who have not yet experienced boarding but will board at their next school, are given the opportunity to board for part of the week to support their transition. Children who join the school outwith the usual transition periods are welcomed warmly to the school and assigned a buddy to help them. This helps children to settle quickly into school life and helps to ease any concerns they may have about moving to a new school.
- Senior leaders respond sensitively to any issues of equity and inclusion in a discrete manner, with a clear focus on keeping the needs of the child at the centre of all decision making. As a result of this approach, almost all parents say they are comfortable approaching the school if they want to share a problem or concern.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

excellent

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

- Data supplied by the school shows that around 25% of children currently require varying degrees of additional support to be successful in their learning. Recent changes to staff responsibilities are helping to ensure these children are supported very well. In Form 8, children sit Common Entrance exams. The majority of children are successful in gaining a variety of significant scholarships for their chosen schools after leaving Cargilfield School. Commendably, by the time children in Form 8 left school in June 2022, almost all children achieved places for their chosen senior school, with the majority of children achieving significant scholarships at high-performing independent schools across the United Kingdom. Children gain a wide range of scholarships, including for academic attainment, sport, art, music, technology, drama and for all round achievement.

Literacy and English

- At all stages of the school, a significant majority of children make excellent progress in literacy and English, attaining levels that are far beyond expectations for their age and stage. Across the school, children use their knowledge and apply their literacy skills very confidently across the curriculum and in different contexts for learning.

Listening and Talking

- Across the school, almost all children are making excellent progress in listening and talking. They are eager to engage in high level, purposeful conversations. Children speak confidently and articulately whilst actively listening to others. In P1, almost all children listen and take turns particularly well. Almost all children at P3 listen to increasingly complex oral information and use this to make comprehensive notes. By Form 8, older children select and listen to spoken texts to find information for a specific purpose. They make sophisticated oral presentations showing an impressive awareness of different communication techniques, including eye contact, non-verbal cues and pace. Across the school, children are encouraged to challenge confidently, but respectfully, the views of others. This is clearly demonstrated in the enthusiasm of children from Form 6 to Form 8 as they take part in weekly debates. Children display outstanding listening and talking skills, for example in leading and participating in parliamentary style debating. They articulate clearly a given motion, argue competently their well-researched case and deal ably with rebuttals and points of information from their peers. Their understanding of the nuances of language is particularly impressive, as is their ability to construct and build on arguments.

Reading

- Children's attainment in reading is very good overall across the school, with excellent progress at the upper stages. In P1, children are developing their strategies for reading effectively, building knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns. They are building up their sight vocabulary very well through class activities and can read simple texts. Almost all children in P3 read confidently and are aware of punctuation which supports expression and understanding when

reading aloud. Across the school, children have a strong awareness of genre and discuss very confidently different kinds of books, identifying key features of fiction and non-fiction texts. At the upper stages, almost all children read particularly well with great fluency and expression. They comment knowledgeably on the books they are reading and identify the main features of the writer's craft. At the upper stages, most children are operating at an exceptionally high level and are making excellent progress. They synthesise information from a wide range of sources, including complex poetry and challenging texts such as the works of Shakespeare. They make judicious reflections about the texts they read and interrogate.

Writing

- Almost all children are making at least very good progress in writing. Across the school, a significant majority of children are making excellent progress, regularly producing texts that far exceed national expectations for their age and stage. In P1, children write short stories independently using their knowledge of sounds and letter patterns particularly well. In P3, almost all children write impressively for a range of purposes, such as instructions for science experiments and personal reports. They are exploring different kinds of writing and are learning a range of literary tools to enhance their writing. At Form 7, almost all children write extremely well in a variety of different genres. They write a range of extended pieces of writing demonstrating sustained quality. At Form 8, most children write in a highly sophisticated way. They use appropriate language to influence the reader and provide relevant evidence to support their judgements. The presentation and accuracy of children's work is very high across the school.

Numeracy and Mathematics

- Almost all children are making at least very good progress in numeracy and mathematics. They apply their learning confidently in different subject areas and contexts, such as science, music, art and design technology. At all stages of the school, a significant minority of children exceed national expectations and standards relative to their age and stage. A few children across the school have a particular aptitude for numeracy and mathematics and operate at an exceptional level. High numbers of children at the upper stages perform consistently highly in national mathematics competitions and challenges, often in competitions for young people of a much higher age.

Number, money and measure

- Across the school, almost all children show a secure understanding in number processes and place value. At all levels, all children use mathematical language accurately to explain number processes.
- Almost all children in P1 identify and recognise numbers from zero to 30 and beyond. Almost all ably add and subtract within ten and count in twos, fives and tens. At Form 4, almost all children use number operations correctly. They divide numbers accurately and are beginning to understand the link between multiplication, division and fractions. Almost all children estimate accurately length and convert centimetres into metres. In Form 5, children confidently use strategies, such as highlighting key words in problems, to enable them to process information and work towards a solution. At Form 7, children apply their knowledge of problem solving in creative ways, independently picking the best strategies to solve mathematical problems. They talk very confidently about different ways to display their answers to challenging tasks. By Form 8, almost all children excel in selecting and comparing a range of methods to solve a range of very complex algebraic equations.

Shape, position and movement

- By P2, all children identify two-dimensional shapes and almost all identify a range of three-dimensional objects. Children in Form 5 describe the properties of three-dimensional objects. They use positional language confidently when describing compass points and directions. By Form 8, children have a strong understanding of complementary and supplementary angles and use this knowledge to calculate missing angles.

Information Handling

- In P1, children sort and display data in different ways. Children in Form 4 independently collect information using tally marks and display their data in a range of graphs and charts. In science lessons, children at the upper stages apply their mathematical learning exceptionally well. They plot the results of their experiments accurately to produce informative line graphs, labelling the axes and calculating the scale correctly.

Other curricular areas

- Outwith literacy and numeracy, children achieve excellent levels of attainment across the curriculum. For example, in languages, children learn French from P1 onwards, taught by specialist teachers. Their learning progresses particularly well as they move through the school. By the upper stages, children can read, write and speak in French to an impressive level. At the upper stages, children also learn Latin and Greek. Their knowledge and application of grammar in each of these languages is outstanding. Almost all children at Cargilfield School make the most of the opportunity to learn at least one musical instrument, often to a very high level. Many children achieve practical and theory music exams, for example in singing, piano, brass, strings, woodwind, piping and drumming. Children perform in mini-concerts and recitals throughout the year, developing their technique and confidence in playing to audiences. In art, children of all ages produce a portfolio of superb paintings, drawings and three-dimensional pieces. From P1 onwards, children's knowledge of the works of an extensive range of famous artists is commendable. They compare and contrast the styles of different artists confidently and demonstrate their sound understanding of specific techniques in their own creative interpretations.
- Children in the upper school recently participated in a national science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) competition. They showcased their advanced understanding of physics by launching successfully a model rocket they had invented and built. Children of all ages enjoy taking part in motivating STEM challenges organised by visiting staff from Imperial College, London. Cargilfield School staff invite local schools to share their learning, expertise and passion for STEM.
- Children in Cargilfield School demonstrate their exceptional confidence, leadership and communication skills by regularly winning national debating competitions. Teachers and children actively share their expertise in this area with learners and staff in a neighbouring primary school.

Attainment over time

- Attainment information shows a clear pattern of sustained, outstanding levels of attainment across the school and importantly, across curriculum areas. Teachers across individual subjects and stages gather robust, detailed information about children's progress and attainment across their learning. Middle leaders work together collaboratively to create a full overview of all children's progress and attainment across the entirety of their learning. Senior leaders and teachers analyse the effectiveness of all interventions that support children's progress over time. They adapt these interventions whenever necessary to ensure all children make the best possible progress.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- The overall quality of children's achievements and skills development at Cargilfield School is highly commendable and is continuing to evolve. This area of the school's work is outstanding. The school's vision that 'learning is an everyday adventure' is embedded clearly across all areas of the life and work of the school. As a result, children's very high levels of participation and successes through extra-curricular activities are commendable. All staff and children value this type of learning as a natural extension of the academic curriculum. Across the school, children achieve very high standards in a broad range of skills, developed through a wealth of exciting and worthwhile opportunities. Many children achieve nationally acclaimed awards in a variety of prestigious sporting competitions. For example, children win awards in artistic gymnastics, British Youth Dressage and Scottish Swimmer Championships. A high proportion of children are also achieving increasingly broader achievements, as a result of staff's commitment to develop each child as an individual. For example, children achieve accreditation in National Indoor Climbing Awards, the John Muir Award and National Navigation Awards.
- Staff value and celebrate the achievements of all children. This is demonstrated through assemblies, displays, online platforms, newsletters and prizegiving events. Children's many talents are showcased in lunchtime musical performances, high quality drama productions, sports match fixtures and debating events. Staff record and monitor all children's achievements on the school's records management system. In Forms 6, 7 and 8, children use personal e-profiles very responsibly to record and reflect thoughtfully on their own successes.

Equity for all learners

- Central to senior leaders' and staff's work at Cargilfield School is ensuring they meet the individual academic and developmental needs of all children. Through the admissions process, the school has processes in place to analyse how to best meet the needs of prospective learners. Staff roles have developed and evolved over recent years, ensuring that children's needs are met very well across all curricular areas, as well as for achieving more widely.
- The headmaster and senior management team manage very sensitively and judiciously, opportunities to provide access for all prospective children and families to Cargilfield School. They take steps to ensure, for example, access to uniform and sports equipment through the 'Friends of Cargilfield'.

Practice worth sharing more widely

The bespoke curriculum rationale at Cargilfield School achieves a balance between achieving outstanding academic standards and expectations, while ensuring children's emotional and mental wellbeing is nurtured.

The design of the school day ensures that all children have space and extended time to relax, play and socialise. For example, morning break is longer than in most schools. Children follow their own interests, make the most of the school grounds or take part in clubs during this time. Lunchtimes provide more opportunities for children to take part in enriching activities. Lunchtimes are social occasions, where children and teachers eat together and chat about the school day. This provides teachers with ideal opportunities to check in with all children each day. All children take part in a wide range of sports and games each afternoon. This provides daily opportunities for children to be outdoors in the fresh air, benefiting from rigorous physical activity. An extensive range of after-school clubs is on offer each day for children of all ages.

For older children, lessons run later in the afternoon than in most primary schools. Due to the amount of time children spend outdoors and the opportunities to relax during the day, they come to lessons refreshed, invigorated and ready to learn.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.