

# School inspection report

20 to 22 January 2026

## **Copthorne Preparatory School**

Effingham Lane

Copthorne

Crawley

RH10 3HR

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors provide leaders with effective challenge and support through regular scrutiny of their work, school visits and the monitoring of safeguarding, teaching and learning, and risk and compliance. They hold leaders to account for the quality of provision and outcomes so that the Standards are met consistently.
2. Leaders have appropriate knowledge and skills and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, identifying effective practice and areas of development that inform their decisions to promote pupil wellbeing and ensure that safeguarding arrangements consistently meet statutory requirements. The result is a safe, supportive and well-led school environment.
3. Leaders successfully deliver the school's aims and values, which positively shape pupils' personal development and contribute to an inclusive school culture where everyone is respected.
4. Leaders implement a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum that is thoughtfully adapted to meet the needs of pupils. An extensive programme of trips and visits is aligned to curriculum content, and a range of after-school activities promote pupils' social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development.
5. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, deliver lessons with clear learning objectives and success criteria, and make effective use of a range of high-quality resources. Teachers routinely require pupils to assess their own work and that of their peers, which supports learning effectively. Leaders effectively use assessment systems to track pupils' progress and share information with teachers. Some teachers make effective use of this information to inform their planning and to adapt their teaching accordingly, but this is not yet consistent.
6. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified early and receive timely support, both in lessons and in one-to-one sessions, enabling them to access learning and make progress alongside their peers.
7. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are well provided for because of leaders' decision to prioritise the development of speaking skills. They make good progress in English.
8. Well-planned lessons provide frequent opportunities for pair and group work, which engage and motivate pupils and develop their speaking and communication skills. Pupils acquire new knowledge, deepen their understanding, develop skills and make good progress from their starting points.
9. Children in the early years benefit from a well-planned transition into school life that is delivered by skilled and caring staff. Early years leaders provide a well-resourced curriculum, and accurate tracking of progress and clear communication with parents to support children's learning and development.
10. Leaders ensure that the behaviour policy is effectively implemented, with a clear system of rewards and sanctions that is used by all staff. As a result, pupils' behaviour is good and incidents of disruptive behaviour are addressed appropriately. The anti-bullying policy is clear and appropriate. Bullying is rare and, when it does occur, staff deal with it effectively.

11. Leaders provide effective leadership of health and safety through suitable systems, audits, policy reviews and governor oversight. The clean and well-maintained school premises provide an environment that supports pupils' learning and wellbeing.
12. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to contribute to the local and wider community, strengthening their social development and sense of responsibility. Pupils develop financial understanding and confidence by handling money in real life contexts, preparing them for future responsibility.
13. Older pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education through visits to senior schools, a well-planned leavers' programme, and lessons that build confidence and readiness for new friendships.
14. There is a secure culture of safeguarding across the school. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders and staff are well trained, including in safer recruitment. Records are typically thorough and secure and engagement with external agencies is timely. However, at the start of the inspection, a small number of errors were identified on the single central record of appointments (SCR), but these were rectified during the visit.
15. Leaders ensure that online safety education and systems are effective, helping pupils to use digital technologies safely and responsibly.

## 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:

- ensure that assessment information is used consistently to plan lessons and adapt teaching so that the learning needs of all pupils are met
- ensure that all information recorded on the single central record of recruitment checks is accurate.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

16. Leaders clearly articulate and deliver the school's aims, which are seen to work well in practice. They ensure the school's aims and ethos are clearly understood by the wider community through dedicated information evenings held at the start of the academic year and ongoing communication with parents. They ensure that arrangements to support pupils' academic and personal development are effective and consistently implemented and reviewed through clear policies, plans and schemes of work.
17. Leaders have the knowledge and skills to exercise effective oversight of school life. They are reflective and realistic in their evaluation of the school. They identify what the school does well to promote pupils' wellbeing as well as areas for development. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements, including those for safer recruitment, meet statutory requirements and are reviewed regularly.
18. Governors receive appropriate information and training, including safeguarding training, which enables them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They visit the school regularly to meet with middle leaders and teachers and this gives them first-hand insight into the school's work and the impact of leaders' decision-making. They provide informed challenge and support to leaders and actively monitor the management of safeguarding, risk and regulatory compliance. Regular review of reports provided by leaders enables governors to assure themselves that Standards are consistently met and that pupils' welfare is prioritised.
19. Leaders and governors demonstrate a shared understanding of safeguarding risks pertinent to the school. Leaders respond appropriately to risk and take effective steps to mitigate it through clear procedures and staff training to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of pupils. Temporary risk assessments are implemented for pupils with short-term injuries to ensure uninterrupted access to the curriculum.
20. Leaders ensure that all required information is published in line with statutory guidance and that transparency promotes trust with current and prospective parents. Parents receive comprehensive reports that summarise their child's progress and outline areas for further development.
21. Leaders' prompt actions and their constructive partnerships with external agencies such as children's services and its multi-agency safeguarding hub enable them to secure timely support for pupils when needed. Leaders conduct an annual review of the needs of pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) and provide the local authority with the required relevant information. They notify the local authority as required when pupils leave and join the school at non-standard transition points.
22. Key school policies, such as the safeguarding policy and the behaviour and anti-bullying policies, are effectively implemented and understood by staff and pupils and their impact is monitored by leaders. There is a clear policy for managing complaints. Leaders respond within the required time frames and address concerns promptly, escalating matters to governors where appropriate.
23. Leaders with responsibility for early years provision provide effective oversight so that children's learning and development, safeguarding and wellbeing needs are met consistently and children benefit from a positive start to their education.

24. Leaders fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010 through ongoing monitoring of provision to ensure barriers to access are removed. An accessibility plan is effectively implemented, with recent improvements to facilities including the installation of toilets for pupils, staff and visitors with disabilities.

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

**25. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

26. Leaders design and implement a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum that provides rich academic and co-curricular learning experiences. Pupils in all years acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills appropriate to their age. Leaders ensure that all areas of learning and development, as outlined in the early years foundation stage framework, are covered.
27. Teachers ensure that speaking is a key focus in lessons, with frequent opportunities for pupils to explain their thinking, practise their use of language and learn from each other. This particularly benefits pupils who speak EAL. Subject-specific language is consistently emphasised across the curriculum to support these pupils and they make good progress in English in line with their peers.
28. In the prep school, leaders ensure that the curriculum is thoughtfully designed and that there is clear progression. They meet regularly with subject leads and teachers to review and refine the curriculum so that it provides a suitable level of challenge for all pupils. Leaders' decision to implement a cross-curricular approach to learning through the 'global' curriculum is broadly effective. Themes are delivered in religious studies, history and geography and, where appropriate, extended across other subjects such as English, art and music. Pupils explore a termly global question supported by a linked trip or workshop. Year 6 pupils, for example, explore what makes a good leader through the study of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a visit to the Globe Theatre and an exploration of leadership as expressed in different types of music.
29. Leaders ensure children in the early years learn from activities that match their communication and language needs and meet the requirements of the early years framework. For example, children explore texture, shape and colour as they learn about the natural world. They begin to show empathy by considering why a crab might hide from other sea creatures and they develop the ability to work with others, talk with partners and listen attentively. In Reception, pupils are encouraged to develop a love of writing through weekly 'Royal Writing' lessons, where they don paper crowns and use a quill pen. In Year 1, pupils use subject-specific vocabulary when learning about the natural world, with learning building over time from recognising plants, including terms such as 'deciduous', to observing how plants grow. Teachers model and reinforce sequencing language to support pupils' understanding of processes. Children in the early years benefit from a secure and effective start to their education.
30. Teachers are knowledgeable, skilled and reflective practitioners. They have good subject knowledge, use a range of good quality resources and manage class time and behaviour well. Teachers routinely share lesson objectives and success criteria and plan regular opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and that of their peers. These practices ensure that pupils can see the purpose of their learning and that they learn how to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, pupils are eager to engage in lessons and motivated to take part, contributing confidently to discussions and activities and thinking and learning for themselves. They acquire new knowledge, deepen their understanding and develop skills, making good progress from their starting points.
31. Leaders help to improve teachers' understanding of how to plan lessons that break learning into steps to manage the amount of information that pupils are expected to process and support pupil engagement. These strategies are applied in some subjects to adapt teaching to meet pupils' learning needs. In mathematics, for example, pupils select appropriately challenging tasks and move on when ready, using toolkits, knowledge organisers and partner talk to support their learning.

Leaders make effective use of standardised test data to track pupils' progress and identify gaps and they share this information with teachers. However, although some teachers use assessment information to plan lessons and adapt teaching accordingly, this practice is not yet consistent across subjects and the learning needs of all pupils are not always met.

32. Assessment in the early years is systematic, with a statutory progress check completed at age two, a baseline assessment carried out on entry to Reception and early learning goal outcomes recorded at the end of the stage and shared with parents. Teachers use nationally recognised guidance to inform their observations and planning, enabling them to accurately identify children's next steps and support their progress over time.
33. Support for pupils who have SEND follows a clear step-by-step approach. Teachers are the first to raise concerns and explore these through classroom observation, the gathering of background information and ongoing checks. Regular assessment identifies pupils' needs early, with leaders drawing up comprehensive, individualised pupil passports that are shared with teachers and parents, reviewed regularly and used to plan an appropriate level of support that matches each pupil's needs well. Leaders implement targeted group programmes or one-to-one provision, including support for reading, spelling, touch typing, fine motor development and emotional needs. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
34. Leaders ensure that pupils are offered a wide range of after-school activities. From computer game design to circuit fitness and debating to cookery, the range of activities on offer successfully promotes pupils' social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development.

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

- 35. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

36. Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is delivered to all year groups through weekly wellbeing lessons. In line with the school's aims and values, the programme encourages pupils to be respectful and to develop outward looking attitudes. Lessons develop pupils' understanding of family and relationships, health and wellbeing, personal safety, the changing body, citizenship and economic wellbeing.
37. Leaders promote an ethos of kindness, respect and inclusion that results in positive relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils of different backgrounds and cultures. PSHE and assemblies promote events such as World Religion Day, LGBT History Month and Holocaust Memorial Day, enabling pupils to understand differences, identity and their responsibilities as part of a diverse society. All pupils learn about diversity and tolerance and are encouraged to share in the school's values. Conflict is rare and any low-level issues that do occur are resolved appropriately.
38. Leaders implement a broad programme to promote pupils' spiritual and moral understanding. Pupils gain first-hand experience of different religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity. Parents of various faiths act as guest speakers and pupils visit places of worship such as a Sikh temple and a mosque. They learn about religious festivals such as Diwali and Holi through the global lesson programme. Teachers invite pupils to consider potential conflict between religions and how this can be resolved by learning about important figures such as Mother Teresa. In response to the school's diverse community, leaders are sensitive to and accommodating of pupils' religious and cultural needs.
39. Leaders help to raise pupils' self-esteem through inclusive displays of their work and honours boards that celebrate achievement, for example in music. Teachers encourage children in the early years to develop self-confidence by taking the initiative to select their own activities within the classroom environment. Shared story time and collaborative tasks encourage mutual respect. Teachers help older pupils to develop self-confidence through positive reinforcement initiatives such as 'pink for praise' marking; in assemblies carefully chosen song lyrics are used to promote pupils' self-belief. Pupils show interest in their work, readily sharing their achievements and speaking enthusiastically about their learning.
40. Leaders place great emphasis on physical development by implementing an extensive and inclusive PE curriculum. Physical education lessons are well organised with clear demonstrations and structured activities. Leaders ensure equal access to the physical education curriculum, for example by giving both boys and girls equal opportunity to play rugby. Pupils are physically confident, active and healthy, demonstrating stamina, co-ordination and teamwork.
41. Leaders ensure that children in early years follow a suitable and well-considered programme that supports their personal, social and emotional development and which is rooted in the primary areas of development. Teachers make appropriate links to the school's global curriculum, for example by linking early learning more closely to themes of exploration and adventure. Teachers routinely combine Nursery and Reception classes to enable children to work together to solve problems independently and collaboratively.

42. The physical development of children in early years is promoted through daily outside play in a well-resourced area. Children develop their gross motor skills through weekly swimming lessons where they practise safe entry techniques, develop basic water-safety positions including the starfish float and build confidence in submerging their faces.
43. Leaders implement a carefully considered relationships and sex education (RSE) programme and consult with parents appropriately on its content. The RSE curriculum meets statutory requirements, is delivered by well-trained staff in an age-appropriate way and complies with the Equality Act 2010. With parental permission, Year 6 pupils receive elements of the sex education curriculum to support senior school transition. Leaders handle requests for withdrawal sensitively, following statutory guidance. They ensure the effectiveness of RSE through regular monitoring and review and make changes in response to pupils' needs and parental feedback, for example introducing a programme to help pupils manage peer relationships. Pupils develop a clear understanding of relationships and personal boundaries through the effective teaching of respect and consent.
44. Pupils understand the clear behaviour policy which staff implement consistently. Leaders ensure that all staff, teaching and non-teaching, feel empowered to challenge poor behaviour and reward positive behaviour. Positive teacher-pupil relationships and clear behaviour expectations, supported by a rewards system, contribute to a safe and orderly learning environment and to pupils' motivation and engagement. As a result, pupils behave well and learn in a calm and orderly environment with minimal disruption. In the early years, teachers' use of hand signals, gentle reminders and a warm, respectful tone ensure that children stay settled, safe and engaged.
45. Leaders implement an effective anti-bullying strategy that is closely monitored and acted upon. Pupils feel safe from bullying and harassment and are confident that concerns are taken seriously. Bullying is rare and when it does occur it is dealt with promptly and effectively by staff.
46. Leaders oversee robust arrangements for health and safety by implementing effective systems, carrying out regular audits, including those from external providers and completing annual policy reviews, all supported by effective governor oversight.
47. The school takes suitable precautions to reduce the risk of fire. Staff are trained in fire safety, and fire evacuation drills take place termly. Leaders regularly carry out all required checks on equipment and systems and keep detailed records. There is a suitable fire risk assessment in place. Pupils' understanding of safety procedures is secure, including fire drills and lockdown practice.
48. Staff supervise pupils appropriately at breaktimes and when they arrive at and depart from the school. Pupils are confident that there is always a member of staff on hand to help them. Staff supervise children in the early years closely, including during mealtimes and when the youngest children in the Nursery are sleeping.
49. Suitably trained staff manage pupils' medical needs and first aid arrangements effectively. There is an adequate number of paediatric first aid trained staff in the early years and training in emotional support for medical staff further promotes the wellbeing of pupils. A well-equipped medical room provides a space for pupils to be assessed and treated. Medicines are stored appropriately and additional first aid equipment is located around the school. Comprehensive care plans are in place for pupils with more complex medical needs.

50. The school maintains admission and attendance registers in accordance with statutory guidance. The attendance champion monitors attendance, looks for trends and follows up absences with parents where necessary. Governors maintain effective oversight of attendance through regular updates from leaders.

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

**51. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

52. Leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in modern British society. Well-planned PSHE teaching helps pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of diversity, respect and civic values, equipping them to contribute positively within the school and the wider community. Leaders reinforce key messages through assemblies, where pupils have opportunities to discuss and share ideas and beliefs with their peers. In addition, teachers carefully select resources, including appropriate reading books in Year 1, to reflect a wide range of family circumstances.
53. A range of experiences broadens pupils' understanding of culture, community and wider society. A modern languages day, for example, helps pupils to explore the food, culture, wildlife and habitat that can be found in a variety of French and Spanish speaking countries. In music and art, pupils explore a range of cultural traditions, such as Diwali and the significance of samba within Brazilian Christian celebrations.
54. Pupils learn about rights and responsibilities, including the principle that everyone has the right to be treated equally. In English, for example, younger pupils are encouraged to show empathy towards others by being prepared to put themselves in the place of animals who are being treated unfairly.
55. Leaders ensure that pupils are taught about the rule of law. During house assemblies, for example, pupils are invited to bring board games into school and to play them together, helping them to understand that rules, and therefore laws, apply to everyone and exist to ensure fairness and safety.
56. Leaders provide pupils with meaningful responsibilities that promote accountability and provide opportunities for pupils' participation and influence. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the pathways available to them, including form captains who are selected following a class vote, house captains, prefects and heads of school. They can identify examples of tangible outcomes that have resulted from pupil leadership such as changes to the lunch menu.
57. Pupils develop a respect for public services through meaningful engagement with visitors including firefighters, paramedics and police from early years through to Year 6. Pupils actively contribute to charitable and community initiatives that reflect the school's stated aims and values. They develop a sense of social responsibility by participating in initiatives such as foodbank collections and whole-school fundraising events. These experiences help pupils to understand the needs of others beyond their own community and to develop compassion and empathy.
58. Older pupils are helped to prepare for the transition to the next stage in their education. They visit senior schools, both for taster days and to take part in a variety of events and competitions. They benefit from a well-planned leavers' programme and a unit in the wellbeing curriculum is designed to help them get ready to make new friends with confidence.
59. Careers speakers drawn from the parent community provide insight for pupils in Years 5 and 6 into a range of occupations, exploring the skills required, including communication and teamwork. Gender stereotypes are challenged through a 'Women in STEM' (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) presentation delivered by a parent to ensure careers guidance is impartial.

60. Pupils learn about age-appropriate economic concepts that help to prepare them for future financial responsibility. They develop confidence in and a practical understanding of managing money through real-world opportunities to handle it, such as managing spending money on school trips and running stalls to raise funds for charity,
61. Children in the early years benefit from a wide range of activities that promote their social development alongside their physical, creative and emotional development, including the opportunity to take part in a range of different sports, music and singing activities. Regular unstructured outside play in all weathers further promotes the children's social and emotional wellbeing.

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

- 62. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

63. Leaders have established a robust safeguarding culture that follows statutory guidelines and is effectively monitored by governors. A safeguarding governor regularly visits the school and meets with school leaders with responsibility for safeguarding to scrutinise their decision-making. Working together, the safeguarding governor and leaders identify risks, including contextual risks posed to pupils, and take steps to mitigate these to keep pupils safe.
64. All safeguarding leaders are appropriately trained and receive regular updates. All staff receive suitable training at induction which includes information on safeguarding issues relevant to the school. Staff receive regular safeguarding updates in line with statutory guidance. The leader with responsibility for safeguarding in the Nursery works with staff to ensure that their knowledge is equally secure.
65. Staff recognise the importance of raising concerns about pupils, as well as about adults working at the school, and there is a suitable system for self-referral. Staff escalate concerns appropriately in accordance with school policies.
66. Leaders maintain clear records of safeguarding concerns and have a secure understanding of local safeguarding thresholds. They identify which concerns meet the threshold for referral and act accordingly. Leaders seek guidance from, and refer to, the local authority when appropriate. These steps ensure that safeguarding concerns are managed swiftly and appropriately, so that pupils are protected and supported at the earliest possible stage.
67. Pupils know whom they can speak to should they have a concern. The leader with responsibility for safeguarding uses assembly time to remind pupils of the various routes available to them, including talking to their form tutor and placing a note in a worry box. Leaders regularly gather the views of pupils through wellbeing surveys and act on the results. Pupils feel confident that leaders will take their worries seriously and dealt with them promptly.
68. Leaders oversee systems for internet filtering and monitoring, and regular testing is carried out and recorded. Leaders follow up on any concerns to ensure that pupils are kept safe when online. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online through wellbeing lessons, form time and innovation lessons and they learn how to recognise trusted adults by their lanyards. They show age-appropriate awareness of how to keep themselves safe.
69. Safer recruitment procedures are followed consistently. Leaders involved in recruitment receive appropriate training and ensure that all staff taking part in the process are trained in safer recruitment procedures. The school carries out recruitment checks on all staff and governors before they start work at the school, and the outcome of these checks is recorded on the SCR. At the start of the inspection, a small number of errors were identified on the SCR, but these were rectified during the visit.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

**70. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## School details

<b>School</b>	Copthorne Preparatory School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	936/6438
<b>Registered charity number</b>	270757
<b>Address</b>	Copthorne Preparatory School Effingham Lane Copthorne Crawley West Sussex RH10 3HR
<b>Phone number</b>	01342 712311
<b>Email address</b>	office@copthorneprep.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.copthorneprep.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Copthorne School Trust Limited
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Anne Fletcher
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Ben Purkiss
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 11
<b>Number of pupils</b>	167
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14 to 16 March 2023

## Information about the school

71. Copthorne Preparatory School is a co-educational independent day school. Founded in 1902, it is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. A new executive headteacher and a head of school have been appointed since the previous inspection.
72. There are 39 children in the early years setting, comprising two Nursery classes and one Reception class.
73. The school has identified 23 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
74. The school has identified English as an additional language for 64 pupils.
75. The school states that its aims are to provide an outstanding, ambitious, nurturing, diverse and transformative community which puts wellbeing, innovation, learning to learn and breadth at the heart of the pupils' experience, encouraging and enabling achievement for all.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

20 to 22 January 2026

76. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

77. 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 the chair and other 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

78. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)