

School inspection report

23 to 25 April 2024

Bishop's Stortford College

School House

Maze Green Road

Bishop's Stortford

CM23 2PQ

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. Leaders have the skills and understanding to prioritise pupil wellbeing in their decision making effectively so that the Standards are met.
2. Governors exercise effective oversight over the school's leadership. They know the school well through regular meetings, clear communication with leaders and scrutiny of leaders' reports. The governing body ensures that its members have the appropriate range of experience to support and challenge the executive.
3. Leaders have shaped a broad curriculum which adapts to meet pupils' needs. Recent changes have restructured the school day and made further space in the curriculum for extra-curricular activities so that pupils extend their range of skills and understanding.
4. Leaders in the early years have designed a curriculum which enables children to learn highly effectively, including through creative play, so that they make rapid progress across all areas of learning. Leaders in the early years skilfully blend planned learning with in-depth teaching that follows children's interests and challenges children to observe and articulate their thinking. As a result, children thrive in a nurturing learning environment where they develop problem solving skills beyond the norm for their years. This is a significant strength of the school.
5. Teaching across all departments of the school typically enables pupils to make good progress. Teachers know their classes well and deliver well planned and engaging lessons. Pupils in the pre-prep show high levels of focus for their ages owing to the teachers' subject knowledge and the engaging activities. Pupils in the prep school engage well with challenging material. Most lessons feature teaching that is adapted effectively to meet the needs of individual pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, such teaching is not as developed in the senior department as it is in other parts of the school.
6. Leaders of boarding implement an effective house system that nurtures boarders' emotional wellbeing. Boarders are cared for in a supportive environment which meets their welfare needs. They know whom they can go to should they have a concern. Boarders across the age range work well together for the good of their house community.
7. Health and safety are robustly managed across the site. All checks and policies are up to date and effective risk assessments are in place. Staff resolve issues quickly and effectively should any occur. The school premises and accommodation, including the boarding houses, are well maintained.
8. The relationships education and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes contain age-appropriate content and are effective. They and the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and 'life skills' programmes support pupils' emotional wellbeing well whilst preparing them for life beyond the school.
9. Leaders facilitate pupils contributing to society both locally and internationally. Such contributions range from the chamber choir performing in local churches and pupils in the prep school visiting the food bank to the annual visit to a link school in Africa. These opportunities help pupils understand how they can contribute to the lives of others and broaden their sense of social responsibility.

10. The school has a well-developed safeguarding culture. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are appropriately trained and all policies and procedures are up to date and conform to current statutory guidance. Staff know how to respond to any safeguarding concerns. Leaders monitor the welfare of any pupils affected by safeguarding issues and liaise with relevant external agencies effectively.

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 teaching in the senior school embeds effective practice consistently to meet the needs of individual pupils, including those who have SEND.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders have the skills and understanding to support pupils' wellbeing effectively. Governors maintain regular and effective oversight of the school's policies and procedures to ensure that the Standards are met, such as through presentations by leaders with particular responsibilities, regular focused meetings with school leaders and attendance at an annual 'governors' education day' in the school.
12. Leaders and governors work together to ensure that staff and parents have an understanding of the ethos and direction of travel for the school. Leaders work effectively with external agencies and consult widely with stakeholders so that the grounds behind their decision making are apparent.
13. Leaders of boarding have established an effective house system in which pupils feel safe, respected as individuals and supported as members of a diverse and welcoming community. The boarding policies and handbook provide pupils and parents with helpful information.
14. Leaders of curriculum in the senior school have introduced adaptations which have brought opportunities for creative breadth and individual choice so that pupils have further opportunities to modify their courses and to develop their skills. Leaders in the prep school have designed a curriculum which is well planned and supports teaching that fosters pupil engagement and good progress. Through collaborative planning and regular reviews, leaders monitor the effectiveness of the educational provision. Leaders of the pre-prep department have established a setting in which pupils are able to make at least good progress, with rapid progress made in the early years.
15. The school's policies and all required information, including regular reports about pupils' progress and learning, are provided to parents, with much of this information provided on the school's website. Leaders also share with parents details of the school's strategic projects, which fosters understanding across the community of the school's aims, approach and intentions. Leaders provide the local authority with appropriate information related to any pupils who receive funding.
16. Robust and systematic procedures are in place for managing risk. Staff are trained and supported, and the updating of risk assessments is comprehensive and well planned. Termly meetings are held to review the provision for risk management including the identification of potential risks that are harder to spot. A wide range of suitable risk assessments are in place, including for the site, local and international visits and trips and for individuals with particular needs.
17. Leaders ensure that the school complies with equality legislation. A suitable accessibility plan is in place and identifies appropriate measures to ensure that any pupils with a disability can access the curriculum and premises effectively. Leaders ensure that no groups of pupils are discriminated against.
18. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities ensure that pupils know who to turn to if they have a concern. They are appropriately and regularly trained for their role and respond to any safeguarding concerns effectively, including by liaising with relevant external agencies when appropriate.
19. The complaints procedure is suitable and implemented appropriately. The record of complaints is detailed and includes identification of any actions taken as a result of complaints submitted,

whether upheld or not. Complaints are responded to in a timely fashion and reviewed regularly by leaders, with any trends or patterns identified.

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

20. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. The broad curriculum is planned effectively to enable pupils to develop their skills across a range of subjects and make connections between them. For example, pupils in the pre-prep applied their skills in literacy and numeracy together with their knowledge of the environment in a lesson considering an alien visitor, while sixth-form pupils were able to reflect upon the links between filmic texts and ideas drawn from contemporary philosophy. Leaders utilise assessment data effectively to inform planning and adjust schemes of work to strengthen the outcomes for pupils. Schemes of work identify opportunities for specific tasks and key resources to be used to support pupils' progress.
22. Teachers plan lessons well overall, have good subject knowledge, draw on a wide range of suitable resources, and utilise targeted questioning to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding effectively. As a result, pupils typically make good progress and are engaged and attentive. Many older pupils attain beyond expected levels in public examinations.
23. Pupils are confident linguists and show a well-developed understanding of the workings of language as a result of challenging teaching which employs the target languages so that pupils receive instructions and engage in dialogue confidently and accurately. Teachers promote pupils' understanding of fundamental grammatical structures, including by exploring how these compare in different languages. Pupils in the pre-prep make good progress in literacy. This stems from their early development of a secure understanding of the sounds that letters make.
24. Pupils' mathematical and scientific knowledge is well developed owing to skilled and clear communication of teachers' good subject knowledge and teaching which challenges and supports pupils appropriately. The effective in-class support from teaching assistants in the prep school, who know the children well and individualise the guidance they offer, helps pupils from all starting points make good progress. Pupils show high levels of creative skills and well-developed technological skills owing to the provision of effective specialist teaching and clear explanation and modelling of technique by teachers.
25. Teaching in the early years enables children to hypothesise, evaluate and reflect on their work across all areas of learning at a level beyond the norm for their ages. Staff's effective, knowledgeable dialogue with children, both in well-planned adult-led and child-directed activities and play, enables the children to make rapid progress in all areas of learning.
26. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) make good progress owing to support from specialist teachers and the use of well-chosen resources that support language acquisition. Leaders assess this group of pupils' needs carefully, fostering good progress and increased confidence and ability in using English.
27. Pupils who have SEND have individual education plans (IEPs) which range from the provision of structured resources to the use of seating plans, and which typically support pupils making good progress. However, the strategies identified in IEPs are not consistently applied. In most lessons, teachers plan and deliver lessons that respond to the specific needs of individual pupils who have SEND effectively, with the result that they progress well. However, teaching in the senior school is not consistently adapted to meet individual pupils' needs as effectively as it is in other parts of the school.

28. The assessment framework is effective. Leaders track pupils' progress and attainment in detail using a range of criteria to identify patterns and any need for additional support. This includes the provision of academic clinics across the senior school which provide opportunities for one-to-one support. Teachers' feedback to pupils enables them to understand the most effective features of their work and where it could improve further.
29. There is a suitable range of extra-curricular activities, collected by the school under the headings of 'academic, active and creative'. This provision enables pupils to develop their skills in working with their peers and in each of these areas. The 'life skills' programme caters for a broad range of interests from current politics to media editing with the result that the pupils develop their knowledge and skills in the areas chosen.

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

30. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

31. Leaders promote pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing effectively. An online tracking system is effective in helping pastoral staff monitor the emotional wellbeing of pupils, enabling them to identify where additional pastoral support is needed to meet pupils' needs. New pupils, including boarders, settle well owing to the structure of supportive induction events and the provision of a pupil 'buddy'.
32. Assemblies and lessons in the PSHE programme, such as on how to 'show racism the red card' and on issues of rights, enable pupils to understand that they should respect everyone and not discriminate against someone on grounds of aspects of their identity including race, age, gender, sexual orientation and disability.
33. Pupils' spiritual and moral understanding is developed through tutor group activities, talks from external speakers and in assemblies such as those given by the chaplain on, for example, moral lessons that can be learned from St. George. Pupils study different faiths, including by visiting diverse places of worship and listening to visiting speakers reflecting on their own religions. Leaders and teachers across the curriculum encourage pupils to reflect on their own spirituality, including through exploring 'mindfulness' lessons.
34. Pupils develop self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. Pupils in the early years quickly grow in confidence, developing in resilience and in their ability to respond to challenges and new experiences. Pupils' self-confidence grows owing to opportunities provided by the school for them to test their perceptions against others' and to present their ideas in councils and assemblies. There is an expectation from pupils that they will be listened to and have their viewpoints and feelings appreciated because of the culture of mutual respect established across the school.
35. The physical education (PE) and personal, social and health education programmes help pupils understand the importance of a healthy diet and of taking sufficient exercise. In the prep school, leaders have restructured provision so that pupils have access to specialist teaching that promotes good progress in physical education (PE) and sport.
36. The relationships education and RSE programmes are well planned and taught by specialist teachers via a spiral curriculum so that pupils understand the importance of making good choices and the fundamentals of healthy relationships. Pupils learn about themes such as consent, possible danger signs in relationships and strategies to avoid being pressurised, in an age-appropriate manner. The school consults parents about these programmes.
37. Behaviour management is effective. High expectations of behaviour are in place and modelled by staff, and rewards and sanctions are applied fairly and consistently so that pupils appreciate the consequences of their behavioural choices. The effective anti-bullying strategy includes teaching about different forms of bullying and poor behaviour and their consequences. Leaders and staff respond to any incidents of poor behaviour or bullying promptly and effectively. As a result, pupils treat each other in and out of lessons with care and respect.
38. Pupils are well supervised in school with suitable provision of staff support at all times and when on visits. Children in the early years are supported by an appropriate staff-to-child ratio and carefully

supervised at all times and in all learning areas, with additional consideration taken when they are moving about the school site.

39. Attendance and admissions registers are maintained as required. The local authorities are informed as appropriate when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
40. Health and safety arrangements are effective. Leaders arrange for regular and methodical checks and maintenance of all aspects of the premises and accommodation. Fire safety arrangements are well managed with regular checks of both equipment and premises conducted. Regular fire evacuation drills are held, including during boarding time, and evaluated by leaders for their efficiency. Medical facilities and first aid arrangements are suitable. There are a sufficient number of staff trained in first aid and paediatric first aid to cater for pupils' needs in this regard.
41. Boarding accommodation is maintained to a high standard. Boarders have access to a member of staff at any time and pastoral care assistants are available throughout the day for pupils to consult as needed. The supervision of boarders is well managed. Effective systems for checking in and signing out are in place, with the result that boarders feel safe in their houses.

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

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

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

43. The PSHE programme teaches pupils about the importance of respecting those representing diverse backgrounds, cultures and world views, such as via lessons about themes such as neurodiversity and research tasks which address women's and children's rights. The programme teaches pupils to understand and appreciate multi-culturalism. Pupils learn about the reality of living with a disability, including from listening to first-hand testimony. From an early age, pupils learn about different forms of prejudice and the harm that it can do.
44. Pupils show well developed skills in collaborative learning. They debate with each other confidently and are supportive of each other's achievements. This is because leaders have established a culture which promotes respectful interaction between pupils and values their contributions to each discussion.
45. Focused teaching enables pupils to develop their understanding of British values, including individual liberty and respect for the law, and how these operate in practice. For example, the PSHE programme includes a series of themed series of lessons on 'The Law and You'. Pupils study and debate the balance between individual freedoms and the legal limits on free expression. Teachers ensure that any discussion of political or topical issues is conducted without bias and in a balanced manner. Such discussions help develop pupils' understanding of right and wrong.
46. The careers provision provides pupils with clear and effective guidance about how to prepare for university applications or other learning or work environments. Careers guidance includes informative presentations by alumni and other external speakers. Staff provide guidance to pupils about a wide range of different types of work and career, such as in medicine or engineering. As a result, pupils are able to make well-informed choices about their next steps in work or education.
47. The effective 'life skills' programme prepares pupils for life beyond the school. It boosts the pupils' economic competence and understanding of areas from student finance to broader economic matters. Pupils in the prep school develop their economic understanding through activities such as 'Grow £1'. They also learn about different services in society, such as the police and medical services and develop their social understanding through discussion of different types of family groups.
48. Pupils learn about democracy via assemblies, the PSHE programme and the 'life skills' programme. Lessons in the history curriculum explore democracy through focused discussion of historical events such as the Hungarian uprising, as well as trips to the Houses of Parliament and study of how government works. Leaders promote democratic understanding for the youngest pupils upwards via the various school councils, with the main council being led by prefects. Representatives are voted for by their peers following hustings, and suggestions debated. From this have come initiatives from pupils such as a new trophy cabinet to celebrate sports successes by female pupils or the designing of bespoke kit for individual houses.
49. The 'house' system develops pupils' ability to mix across year groups. In addition, leaders have provided pupils with a range of possible leadership roles such as when older prefects take responsibility for younger members of their house so that pupils develop their sense of responsibility towards others.

50. Leaders have facilitated opportunities for pupils to make a contribution to society through charitable work. These range from funding classrooms in Zimbabwe and Malawi to work with local charities such as the food bank and a shelter for homeless people in East London. Pupils also make a contribution to the wider society beyond school through helping with courses for local primary-aged children on Saturdays and performing in a nearby church in support of the British Legion. Pupils explore issues such as climate change and reflect on their responsibilities towards sustainability.

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

51. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

52. Leaders have established an effective culture of safeguarding across the school. Staff understand and implement their safeguarding responsibilities well, including that of reporting any allegations or low-level concerns about staff that may arise.
53. Governors exercise effective oversight of safeguarding through scrutiny of regular reports from leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities, visits to the school and through the work of the safeguarding committee which brings governors and pastoral staff together. Governors and leaders ensure that the safeguarding policy and procedures are regularly updated to comply with current statutory guidance as it evolves over time.
54. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL), deputy DSLs and all staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training so that they are confident in how to respond should an incident occur. The DSL maintains detailed and thorough safeguarding records and suitable risk assessments for pupils who have been affected by safeguarding issues.
55. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, including children’s services and the police. They act on advice received. Referrals are made in a timely manner when appropriate.
56. Pupils know who to turn to when they have a concern because leaders have established a listening culture where staff are approachable and generous with their time. Pupils are taught the importance of sharing any worries that they might have and who they can contact should they have any concern, including, for boarders, the independent person. Pupils are taught effectively how to stay safe online. The robust filtering and monitoring system means that a pastoral alert can be raised very quickly should any online activity seem to pose any potential risk.
57. All required safer recruitment checks are made before staff or governors commence working at the school. Appropriate risk assessments are put in place should a criminal record check certificate be delayed. All recruitment checks are recorded accurately in the single central register of appointments.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Bishop's Stortford College
Department for Education number	919/6007
Registered charity number	311057
Address	Bishop's Stortford College School House Maze Green Road Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 2PQ
Phone number	01279 838575
Email address	general.enquiry@bishopsstortford.org
Website	www.bishopsstortfordcollege.org
Proprietor	Bishop's Stortford College Incorporated
Chair	Mr Guy Baker
Headteacher	Mrs Kathy Crewe-Read
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	1283
Number of boarding pupils	185
Date of previous inspection	26 to 27 February 2020

Information about the school

59. Bishop's Stortford College is a co-educational day and boarding school comprising a pre-prep school, a prep school and a senior school, all on the same site within the town of Bishop's Stortford. Founded in 1868 by a group of East Anglian non-conformists, the school is a charitable trust overseen by its board of governors. The current headteacher took up her post in September 2020.
60. The school has five boarding houses: a mixed house for pupils aged 7 to 13 years, two senior houses for female pupils and two senior houses for male pupils.
61. There are 38 children in the early years setting, which comprises two Reception classes.
62. The school has identified 172 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Eight pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. English is an additional language for 75 pupils.
64. The school states its aims are to build confidence for life in its pupils, that they should be fulfilled, skilled, happy and ambitious. The school's aims focus on the all-round growth of its pupils, that they are helped to develop academically, morally, emotionally, spiritually, athletically and creatively.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

23 to 25 April 2024

65. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

66. 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 head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

67. 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**.

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For more information, please visit isi.net