



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Dean Close Airthrie School

June 2023

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School's Details

School	Dean Close Airthrie School			
DfE number	916/6037			
Registered charity number	1086829			
Address	Dean Close Airthrie School 27-29 Christchurch Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL50 2NY			
Telephone number	01242 512837			
Email address	admin.office@airthrie-school.co.uk			
Head	Mr Jason Dobbie			
Chairman of trustees	Mrs Kathryn Carden			
Proprietor	The Dean Close Foundation			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	78			
	EYFS	9	Juniors	69
Inspection dates	13 to 15 June 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Dean Close Airthrie School is an independent co-educational day school, located in the centre of Cheltenham, in Gloucestershire.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has joined the Dean Close Foundation, an educational charity based in Cheltenham, and appointed a new head. Dean Close Airthrie is managed by a board of trustees. The foundation's warden has oversight of all its schools.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 Airthrie School subscribes to the Dean Close Foundation's aims and values: to promote the flourishing of each individual and to develop love, courage and contribution as personal qualities in each pupil.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come mainly from business and professional families living within a 15-mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised data provided by the school indicate that pupils' ability is broadly average, compared with those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 14 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include cognition difficulties, learning and hearing impairment, dyslexia and dysgraphia, of whom 10 receive additional support. No pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. No pupils have English as an additional language (EAL). Data used by the school have identified 16 pupils as being more able in the school population and the curriculum is modified for them.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

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

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

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

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

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

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

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

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

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

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

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

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

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

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

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

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

- Pupils demonstrate excellent communication skills in both written and verbal formats.
- Pupils are confident and proficient in the use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Across the school, pupils approach their learning with enthusiasm and eagerness.

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

- Throughout the school, pupils behave with great courtesy and consideration for others.
- Pupils form strong and positive relationships with each other; they collaborate and interact with each other effectively.
- Pupils have a well-developed understanding of cultural diversity and awareness of individual differences.
- Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of how to stay safe in a variety of different contexts, and an excellent knowledge of factors helping them to stay healthy.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

- Enable pupils to make more consistent progress by improving the analysis and use of assessment data to inform planning for teaching and learning.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

3.5 Data provided by the school indicate that pupils' attainment in English and mathematics, overall, is at least in line with, and in some cases, above age-related expectations. Analysis of tracking data shows that pupils make at least expected progress over time in both English and mathematics. At the time of the inspection visit, it was not possible to derive some judgements of attainment and progress from empirical data because the school had not yet implemented an integrated system for tracking assessment data across all areas of learning. However, scrutiny of pupils' work, discussions with pupils and observation of lessons showed that most pupils make good, and some, excellent progress during their time at the school. Pupils with SEND also attain well and make good progress. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaires agreed that the range of subjects was suitable for their child and almost all agreed that teaching enables their child to make progress.

- 3.6 The development of pupils' communication skills is a strength of the school. Throughout all ages, pupils are confident, respectful and articulate when speaking and listening to each other and teachers. The youngest children communicated their ideas with great detail when describing how Blackbeard the pirate stole the power crystal from the King, in their graphical story. They used correct phonics skills confidently to sound out unfamiliar words. Older pupils spoke their lines clearly and confidently during a drama rehearsal, aided by supportive guidance from teachers. Pupils used persuasive language effectively during a 'Dragon's Den' style activity when pitching innovations to peers and staff. Pupils' writing skills are also at a high level; examples of fastidiously neat writing and lengthy and engaging compositions were seen in scrutiny of Year 3 English books and in a mathematics lesson, where Year 5 pupils clearly and concisely explained their reasoning in order to solve complex angle problems. Year 2 pupils listened carefully, engaging actively in the rhythm and language of a poem being read to them during a physical and mental well-being lesson. Pupils write fluently and adeptly using sophisticated linguistic skills. Year 6 pupils in English used emotive language highly effectively to fully engage the reader in their creative writing compositions.
- 3.7 Pupils are confident and proficient in the use of information and communication technology (ICT), both as a discipline and as a support for learning in subjects across the curriculum. They described how they use the school's tablet computers to research ideas and facts for their cross-curricular topics, for instance, discovering the average dimensions of the world's largest fish. Reception children engaged skilfully and independently with the interactive whiteboard in a shark-counting game. They required no help to access and interact with the software. Scrutiny of younger pupils' work revealed adept use of vector graphic packages to create digital art in the style of Pablo Picasso's abstract paintings, as well as confident manipulation of text and images to produce informative newspaper articles and factsheets in their topic work. Year 1 pupils demonstrated confident coding skills, understanding that it is a series of commands and applying their skills adroitly to create an animated scene. Year 2 pupils used artistic software highly effectively to adeptly use different techniques and tools to create imaginative colour and effect. Teaching utilises age-appropriate software applications effectively to facilitate excellent outcomes for pupils.
- 3.8 Across the school, pupils approach their learning with enthusiasm and eagerness. They described their school as a fun and happy learning environment, during discussions. They explained how the school's recently implemented e-praise system encourages them to try their best in all they do, as they feel that their efforts are properly valued and recognised. In nearly all lessons observed, pupils were fully engaged with their learning and unselfconsciously contributed to the success of the whole group. During a carousel activity in Year 5-6 physical education (PE), smaller groups of pupils competed fairly and maturely when working independently. Year 3 pupils busied themselves energetically to solve verbal reasoning problems, vocalising possible strategies and ensuring that their friends had also understood how to achieve success. Pupils of all ages work together skilfully because the curriculum is deliberately planned to include daily opportunities for collaborative learning. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils worked highly effectively in groups to create 3 dimensional shapes using different materials. Year 2 pupils worked through challenging and complex instructions together, to make origami boats during a physical and mental health lesson. Teachers' affirming support was seen to make learning an enjoyable and rewarding experience for pupils of all ages.
- 3.9 Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding develop well as they progress through the school. Reception children eagerly scanned items in the classroom shop and understood that some form of payment was expected in return for the inspector's ice cream. Year 2 work scrutiny revealed clear emerging skills in data analysis using tally charts. Year 6 pupils Latin work demonstrated effective skills and understanding when identifying and translating infinitives and impersonal verbs. Older pupils explained how they use their knowledge of graphical representation in numeracy when reporting science investigation results. Year 3 pupils clearly explained that tropical areas are found between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. Teaching promotes a strong focus on development of vocabulary through all areas of the curriculum, demonstrated by Key Stage 1 pupils utilising technical scientific vocabulary relating to plants, such as 'tap' and 'fibrous root'. Teaching also actively promotes the

application of understanding in cross-curricular tasks, such as combining science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) building knowledge and principles with understanding of Ancient Greek temples. However, in a small minority of lessons, where the pace was slow and planning was less considerate of individual needs, learning was consequently more limited.

- 3.10 Pupils demonstrate good mathematical knowledge throughout the school, with many opportunities provided for pupils to apply their understanding in real world situations, in broader areas of the curriculum and in problem solving contexts. For example, scrutiny of work revealed that Year 6 pupils initially worked on simple measurements whilst designing mocktails, after which teaching introduced the concept of proportion. This resulted in clear understanding of the latter. Pupils are encouraged to verbalise their thinking out loud and, as a result, develop a clear understanding of mathematical concepts. For example, pupils in Year 5 explained their reasoning highly effectively when calculating complex perimeter and angle problems. Work scrutiny also shows that younger pupils demonstrate a good grasp of number bonds and problem-solving skills in numeracy. Work from pupils with SEND displayed confident counting in twos and fives, with pupils later recognising that when counting in fives, all answers will end in either zero or five. Older pupils described using their numeracy skills readily in science when plotting a graph to compare the year lengths of planets to the distance from the sun and subsequently finding a correlation.
- 3.11 Pupils develop their study skills well during their time at the school. Their skills of analysis grow from an early age: reception children sorted potion bottles into different sizes and reasoned that the biggest might hold the most powerful spell. Year 2 science work seen included detailed analysis of the characteristics that made a swan, then synthesis of the reasons that swans are able to live so successfully on the local river. Year 3 pupils hypothesised that restricting a science investigation on germination to using just cress seeds might not be realistic because there were many other types of plant seeds in existence which might behave differently. Year 4 pupils analysed a story text effectively to synthesise a play script which reflected the storyline accurately. This confidence, and the well embedded culture of curiosity in learning, resulted in pupils demonstrating numerous examples of combined study skills. For instance, Year 2 pupils analysed information and applied creative solutions when designing aliens suited to live on different planets in the solar system.
- 3.12 Pupils participate with some success in local, regional and national, sports, literary, swimming, mathematics, science and artistic festivals. Some are successful at gaining places to schools with competitive entries upon leaving; a small number also achieve academic and other scholarship awards. Some pupils play a musical instrument and undertake ABRSM examinations in music. The school's governance and leadership have ensured that pupils can further develop their personal interests outside of the formal curriculum through engagement with after school clubs and residential trips.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 All parents agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour; this was confirmed by inspection evidence to be the case. Throughout the school, pupils behave with great courtesy and consideration for others. They were observed helping each other without being asked, offering cheerful greetings and showing genuine interest in how each other's day had been. Pupils have a strong instinct for what is right and wrong. They have pride in their good behaviour and respect one another, taking responsibility for their part in maintaining a friendly and safe space to learn. They explained that the school both values and expects excellent behaviour and praises them for it. Pupils also show an unusually mature understanding that poor behaviour can be the result of someone having low self-esteem, describing ways to help by taking positive action to make that person feel better. On the few occasions when they make mistakes, pupils stated that the school encourages them to reflect on what

they have done so that they can understand the impact of their actions. The result is an atmosphere which is calm and inclusive, and where serious sanctions are rarely, if ever required.

- 3.15 Pupils are highly socially aware, adept at collaboration and are confident to share ideas, interacting very effectively with others to achieve success in a variety of tasks. Pupils of different ages engaged happily and purposefully together at break time. This was reflected in academic lessons, where they were observed making positive contributions to each other's learning, encouraging peers to participate in science lessons for example. The school building also abounds with examples of collective artwork as seen, for example, on display in Key Stage 1. Year 4 pupils worked happily together on creating their resist-dye undersea fabric designs. Although focusing on their own designs, the calm and productive atmosphere successfully inculcated by teaching allowed for frequent and productive cross-pollination of ideas. Year 6 pupils worked purposefully together in a mathematics lesson to build specific 3-dimensional shapes. Others described how they had recently performed well in a problem-solving challenge when they were tasked with creating a poncho design from junk materials. They explained that although they had not won the challenge, they were, nevertheless, very proud of their design and the effort that they had invested. Pupils readily celebrate the successes of others, sharing the achievements of their peers eagerly and proudly during discussions with inspectors.
- 3.16 Pupils show high degrees of mutual respect and tolerance to all, regardless of race, religion, family structure or cultural background, as seen in evidence of high-quality discussions on diversity in pupils' personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) books. They have a clear realisation that everyone is a human being, deserving of the same respect. Pupils appreciate and indeed celebrate difference. They outlined learning about the culture and language of Kenya in a cross-curricular context, as a particular academic highlight. In discussions and as widely observed, pupils have a palpable appreciation of each other regardless of their backgrounds. They explained, in discussions, that it is possible just to be your true self at Airthrie, with pupils commenting that individuals' differences 'are what makes us special'. Any notion that difference might be problematic or divisive is entirely alien, due to the well-achieved school aims of developing love, courage and contribution as personal qualities in each pupil.
- 3.17 From the earliest age, pupils develop a keen understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. For example, pupils understand what nutritional choices they should make and explained that they are guided by this most of the time. Older pupils described how their learning in PSHE helps them to make sensible choices in diet, exercise, about their own mental health and also when online. For example, they explained, in some depth, how to keep personal details and passwords secure, what to do if someone unknown contacts them and the possible negative impacts of social media. Pupils' concrete understanding was evidenced in scrutiny of science work on staying healthy, discussing the impact that germs have and how to avoid them. Health understanding was also seen in wider terms within a well-recorded written activity asking learners to play the role of doctors and offer advice based on different diets and calorific intake. Leaders and governance have been highly successful at embedding a culture of safety across the setting. All parents and pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school encourages them to be healthy. In addition, all pupils agreed that the school is a safe place to be and that they knew how to stay safe when online. Inspection evidence supports these views.
- 3.18 As they progress through the school, pupils both acquire and express excellent levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline and resilience. Scrutiny of work supports pupil's explanations, in discussions, that their teachers' assiduous marking and feedback is key to them knowing how they can improve their work. Pupils not only self-correct their work, but also provide each other with effective peer feedback, as seen in the English work of younger pupils which later resulted in demonstrably effective editing. Year 3 pupils described, very clearly, how self-esteem can vary throughout the day and how it was possible to build others' self-esteem, first by recognising the need and then by employing positive and empathetic strategies. Pupils' confidence grows because of the

strong relationships established between pupils and their teachers, from the youngest children upwards. In a Year 5 English lesson, pupils displayed high levels of self-confidence, sharing their ideas and work with others enthusiastically and with pride. Pupils' resilience was exemplified in a Year 1 ICT lesson, where they improved their coding skills, resolving problems highly effectively when the result was not as expected. In interviews, older pupils showed a high level of self-understanding, identifying their own strengths and weaknesses and praised their teachers' guidance in helping them to identify opportunities for further development.

- 3.19 Pupils have a clear understanding of and appreciation for the non-material aspects of life, because the school's culture encourages mindfulness and reflection for spiritual growth. Each classroom contains eye-catching displays which highlight strategies for daily mindfulness tasks, which pupils recalled confidently. In discussions, they cited intangibles such as friendship, family and teamwork, such as in sports, as being of the highest value to them and worth far more than money could buy. They explained that although life can be difficult to navigate at times, friends and family will never let you down. They explained, with great clarity, that writing gratitude letters to peers, being creative or having a quiet time to read are all very special times.
- 3.20 Pupils have excellent decision-making skills. They understand how the decisions they make can affect them personally, as well as others. They make informed decisions based on advice and guidance received and on their own independent research. They explained their clear realisation that certain tasks cannot be delayed, especially if they have deadlines, but that other, sometimes more pleasurable distractions, will always be available when the task is complete. They described how guidance from teaching helps them to prioritise their time sensibly and praised the support they receive from the school. They explained, also, that if they do make mistakes, the school's support encourages them to treat these as opportunities to learn. Citing examples from their learning, they described how, in mathematics, they can sometimes choose the level of challenge, explaining that while it may be tempting to tackle the easier options, it may not be the wisest choice. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their contribution to the school council. They were proud of having influenced the development of the e-praise system and explained that it is far more motivating as a result.
- 3.21 Pupils take great pride in being of assistance to others. Older pupils act as reading buddies to younger ones but explained that this develops into far more than a literary engagement, as they also love playing with and being role models for them. They recall the same benefit when they themselves were younger and explained their pride in being able to continue the loop of giving back. Other pupils take active roles on the school council, as house leaders, librarians, on the school's eco-committee or as pupil support officers. Pupils described their pride in helping to organise fun events or participating in carol-singing in a department store at Christmas to raise money for good causes, such as MacMillan Cancer Care, explaining with great clarity why these were so very important to them. A positive attitude of helping others runs through the school, with 'Wow Wall' display in EYFS celebrating occasions when children had 'helped Mummy with cooking', or 'helped with the washing'. Older pupils reflected, with clear understanding in their written work, upon success criteria to be effective role models, helping them to demonstrate this with confidence to younger peers.

4. Inspection Evidence

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

Inspectors

Mr Kerry Lord	Reporting inspector
Mr Matt Donaldson	Compliance team inspector (Head, ISA school)
Mr Timothy Cannell	Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)