

School inspection report

6 to 8 February 2024

Dean Close Preparatory School

Lansdown Road

Cheltenham

Gloucestershire

GL51 6QS

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. The proprietor, through the foundation's governing body, maintains effective and challenging oversight of the work of leaders and managers. Through regular visits and detailed scrutiny of policies and reports, trustees ensure that leaders' planning is strategic, in the best interests of pupils' wellbeing, and takes into account the varying needs of all pupils.
2. Leaders provide a highly supportive and open ethos in the school, strongly rooted in the school's Christian foundation. Leaders and managers provide an appropriate and dynamic curriculum which pupils find engaging. High-quality teaching consistently enables pupils to make good progress and leaders conduct detailed monitoring so that effective support can be provided for pupils if necessary.
3. Staff conduct skilful assessment and their in-depth awareness of individual pupil needs supports all groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/disabilities (SEND), to make good progress from their starting points.
4. The high-quality sporting facilities and outdoor activities support older pupils to maintain their physical fitness and younger pupils, for example, those in the early years to develop both their fine and gross motor skills.
5. Leaders' strong focus on future skills is aimed at developing all pupils' collaborative skills, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and compassion. These skills are embedded in curriculum planning; however, procedures to quality assure the impact of this provision are not yet sufficiently developed to assess its effectiveness.
6. Leaders and managers strongly encourage mutual respect for others through creating an inclusive, positive and open culture, which supports pupils to feel heard and understood. Staff monitoring of pupils' wellbeing and leaders' well-resourced and strategic provision of personalised support for pupils is effective in enabling pupils to develop self-esteem and confidence.
7. Leaders and managers implement a well-considered curriculum which effectively prepares pupils for their future careers. Staff's skilful support enables pupils to develop their own unique talents and to be ambitious about their future lives.
8. Leaders and managers are rigorous in ensuring that pupils are appropriately safeguarded, through appropriate and effective provision of training for staff, innovative use of technology and high levels of vigilance.

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:

- develop a system to quality assure the impact of leaders 'initiative to improve pupils' skills in the areas of communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and compassion so that leaders can assess the effectiveness of the initiative.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders at all levels in the school have appropriate skills and knowledge to carry out their roles. They are diligent in ensuring that pupils' welfare is promoted as a result of thoughtful attention to detail in the performance of their roles. Leaders articulate clear values and actively promote them through assemblies and their daily interactions between staff and pupils, creating a culture which is supportive, caring and compassionate.
10. Leaders put the wellbeing of pupils at the forefront of their planning. They ensure boarders are provided with comprehensive support by appropriately trained staff. Boarding staff integrate fully into the life of the school forming strong and supportive relationships with pupils.
11. Leaders implement effective procedures to both monitor pupils' academic progress and their wellbeing. Where leaders identify tangible trends through careful analysis of data, they implement effective strategies to support pupils. For example, leaders adopt a consistent, whole school approach to spelling.
12. Trustees maintain appropriate oversight of the school and quality assure provision through regular visits and checks, including holding discussions with pupils and staff. Trustees ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' needs through rigorous scrutiny and monitoring.
13. Leaders' introduction of a future skills programme, 'the 5 Cs', is embedded within the curriculum and is evident in teaching throughout the school. However, leaders do not have a suitable process to monitor the scheme's impact.
14. Leaders define clear policies and procedures and ensure these are implemented effectively and consistently. Leaders implement all necessary policies in the early years provision with requisite resources and highly trained staff.
15. Leaders ensure that all required information, such as policies relating to safeguarding or complaints, are readily available to parents either from the informative school website or by request to the school office. Leaders monitor admissions and attendance appropriately and maintain suitable detailed records.
16. Leaders have a clear approach to managing risk that is both strategic and comprehensive in identifying potential risks of harm to pupils and mitigating those risks. Leaders recognise risks relating to pupils' welfare and mental health and ensure appropriate and detailed risks assessments are completed when such concerns are identified.
17. Leaders make suitable adjustments to ensure pupils have appropriate access to school, both by adapting the curriculum to meet pupils' learning needs and making physical changes, such as installing ramps to facilitate wheel-chair access.
18. Leaders provide effective support for pupils' mental health and wellbeing. Staff are vigilant and appropriately trained and proactively respond to concerns identified. Leaders ensure that pupils and boarders health needs are met offering highly effective support. They organise boarding routines that ensure boarders are treated fairly and with consistency, listening carefully to boarders concerns and suggestions for improvement. They ensure boarders have an appropriate balance of free time

and organised activities. Leaders ensure the school's facilities and boarding accommodation are of a good standard and well maintained.

19. Leaders listen to parents' concerns and act to address these in a timely manner, in line with the school policy. Trustees maintain appropriate oversight of complaints, reviewing outcomes to learn lessons and ensuring detailed records are maintained with appropriate confidentiality.

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. Pupils study a wide range of subjects and have the opportunity to explore their interests through an engaging and imaginative curriculum that, in line with the school's aims, seeks to prepare pupils for their future lives.
22. Leaders provide a curriculum which ensures continuity and the progressive development of skills and understanding throughout a pupil's time at the school. In mathematics, for example, teachers follow a common approach and curriculum from pre-prep to Year 8. This ensures that pupils develop confidence and mastery of mathematical concepts, before extending that into solving complex problems, such as solving algebraic equations.
23. Children in the early years make good progress because of skilful teaching which includes a range of tailored activities to engage children's imagination and develop their language skills.
24. Curriculum planning includes cross-curricular themes, for example, by consistently developing pupils' communication skills across all subject areas. Pupils develop their confidence in speaking both in the teaching of literacy, and drama. This is then deepened through activities, such as public speaking, which support pupils to be articulate and confident when speaking. Leaders' initiative to further develop pupils' skills of communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and compassion, known in the school as the 5Cs, is actively incorporated into curriculum planning. For example, pupils in art are passionate when critiquing the work of their peers, giving balanced and positive opinions about what they like about their peers' work.
25. Staff prepare and plan lessons carefully to ensure that pupils experience a variety of engaging and relevant tasks. Staff take into account pupils' varying and individual learning needs and employ a broad range of appropriate resources in their lessons which enrich pupils' learning and enhance their understanding. Effective staff planning and adaptive teaching methods support pupils to make good progress, including pupils who have SEND. Focused support provided both by specialists and teachers enables pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) to rapidly acquire the language skills necessary to participate in lessons and make good progress. Pupils make frequent and creative use of digital technology, developing their confidence and competence.
26. Staff assess pupils' progress effectively, often in collaboration with the pupils through self-assessment activities. Staff give detailed and constructive feedback so that pupils have a clear understanding of their own strengths and how to improve their work. Staff set appropriate and challenging targets which encourage pupils to reflect critically on their work. Consequently, pupils are appropriately challenged in lessons and engage with intellectual curiosity, making good progress in line with and often above expectations for their ages and starting points.
27. The extensive programme of enrichment activities in sport, music, drama and creative arts, support pupils to be confident, with several pupils becoming accomplished in performance. Leaders meet pupils' recreational needs by providing an array of suitable indoor and outdoor activities in dedicated spaces, for example, the well-resourced library and large covered play area.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. Leaders actively promote a culture of kindness, respect and inclusivity that flows through the interactions between all members of the school community. Staff and pupils maintain highly positive relationships and this effective, caring ethos of mutual trust helps pupils to rapidly find appropriate support when they need it.
30. The diverse and interesting range of sporting and non-sporting activities on offer is effective in helping pupils to explore their talents, find strengths and build self-confidence. In addition to the comprehensive programme of physical education (PE) and sport on the curriculum, leaders maintain a school wide culture of physical activity throughout the school day. Pupils are active and physically fit, engaging enthusiastically with the wide range of sports and physical activities.
31. Teachers reinforce pupils' understanding of how to live healthy lives, including the importance of sleep and nutrition, through the academic and pastoral curriculum. Pupils understand the benefits of regular exercise on their physical and mental health and can describe their emotional state in simple terms.
32. Leaders implement effective programmes of teaching of personal, social and emotional development (PSED) in the early years and for older pupils in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, including citizenship education. These support pupils to develop their understanding of and respect for all groups of people, including those who are different from themselves.
33. Staff know the pupils well, recognising that each pupil is an individual with unique talents. Staff in the pre-prep and prep schools build on the strong, open relationships that are established in the early years and effectively model their expectations of pupils. Pupils are respectful in their interactions with one another, showing an interest in each other's diverse cultures and backgrounds.
34. Leaders of the early years provision implement an effective rewards system to reinforce positive behaviour amongst the children. The school-wide strategy to enable pupils to identify and reflect on their emotional state is effective in helping pupils across the school to regulate their behaviour. Teachers use positive feedback effectively in lessons, clearly identifying both areas of strength and aspects to be improved upon. This helps to build pupils' self-esteem and confidence.
35. Teachers' careful use of questioning supports pupils to offer thoughtful and considerate feedback about their peers' work. This approach underpins the culture of mutual support in the school. Pupils recognise not just their own talents, but also those of their peers.
36. Leaders deliver an appropriate programme of relationships education for all pupils, including age- appropriate sex education. Leaders implement an effective anti-bullying strategy and ensure that staff are appropriately trained.
37. Pastoral leaders maintain vigilant oversight of pupils' wellbeing through active and effective monitoring. Suitably qualified staff provide sensitive and effective support for pupils who experience mental health issues, which is skilfully tailored to meet pupils' individual needs. Class teachers and house tutors, ensure pupils receive effective and sensitive ongoing support.

38. Leaders set high expectations for the standard of behaviour, and staff model and implement the behaviour policy effectively. Pupils are inclusive, respectful and highly supportive of one another. Staff act quickly and effectively to resolve issues positively and fairly. Leaders recognise trends in behaviour that could have negative impacts on groups of pupils and take effective steps to address these through the curriculum or in specific interventions; for example, helping older pupils to resolve friendship issues.
39. Leaders encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour, through strategies that reinforce and reward positive behaviours such as awards presented in assembly. Pupils behave well and show high levels of respect towards one another. Pupils are polite and respectful at all times. They mix easily with each other and show an interest in the different traditions and faiths celebrated at the school.
40. Leaders in boarding extend the school's warm and welcoming ethos into the boarding houses. Leaders take all necessary steps to help maintain the health and wellbeing of boarders. They ensure that adults, who are skilled at listening, are easily available to provide support for boarders.
41. Suitable medical care is provided by first aid trained staff in the dedicated health centre and in the first aid room in pre-prep. Staff consistently implement rigorous medical systems, which ensure that pupils receive timely care and attention. For example, during break, staff trained in first aid provide mobile medical care for minor matters, with more urgent treatment taking place in the well-resourced medical room. All pupils have access to specialist medical staff, including daily availability of GP appointments as well as same-day prescriptions for boarders.
42. Staff provide appropriate and ample supervision for pupils in the day and the boarding houses.
43. The school site is well maintained and health and safety checks are up to date. Fire safety checks are systematically carried out and regular fire drills, supported by staff trained as fire wardens, take place including during boarding time. Leaders carefully review records and risk assess appropriately, implementing suitable changes if necessary. Pupils' attendance is monitored and recorded appropriately.

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

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

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

45. Leaders celebrate the school's Christian foundation by clearly articulating the school's values and ethos most simply as 'love'. This supports pupils to engage openly in an inclusive environment, whether or not they have a faith of their own. For example, pupils in the prep school sang with enthusiasm whilst practising a traditional Christian hymn.
46. Leaders plan engaging activities, lessons and experiences that enable pupils to interact successfully with one another and to contribute meaningfully to broader society. Leaders consider the views of pupils and implement a curriculum that provides pupils with information and understanding about careers and potential jobs. The curriculum is suitably adapted so that it is appropriate for all pupils, commencing in the pre-prep school.
47. Teachers encourage pupils to recognise their own capabilities and relate these to possible future careers. For example, pupils understand the need to learn mathematics for careers such as engineering or teaching. Leaders prepare older pupils well for their futures through the curriculum, through access to the senior school's careers hub and through a programme of relevant and interesting talks by guest speakers. Pupils are confident and ambitious in their career plans, taking inspiration from teachers who support them to recognise their own talents.
48. Teachers provide consistent and well-planned activities that enable children in the early years to socialise with one another in calm and co-operative ways within a variety of contexts. Teachers in the prep school plan lessons which continue to build collaboration skills. For example, older pupils readily worked together to correctly sequence a series of events in chronological order in history.
49. Staff develop pupils' cultural awareness through planned opportunities in the curriculum and in assembly. For example, leaders arrange a programme of visiting speakers from different cultural and religious traditions to speak to pupils in assembly.
50. Boarding staff provide a well-planned and wide range of activities at evenings and weekends, taking into account the views of pupils. Boarders engage actively with these opportunities, enjoying the social time they share together.
51. Leaders develop pupils' environmental awareness through a dynamic curriculum which emphasises the impact humans are having on the world. This supports pupils to recognise the impact of their own actions and to advocate for responsible change. For example, pupils help to grow vegetables in the school's vegetable patch and are planning to reduce the amount of food waste in school by increasing the amount of food being composted. Pupils show care for the school environment, by volunteering to undertake litter picking around the school.
52. Teachers prepare pupils to be active and responsible citizens by providing a range of opportunities for pupils to take responsibilities and to engage with fundraising for charity. Pupils from both the prep and pre-prep school raise funds and donate to a local foodbank, national charities for children and a partner school abroad.
53. Pre-prep pupils actively participate in class councils, whilst prep pupils aspire to become elected representatives on the school council or to represent the school as prefects and house captains.

Leaders meet with pupil representatives and where appropriate implement changes such as the installation of new water fountains.

54. Leaders successfully reinforce the benefits of service to the community through assembly awards to pupils who are successful in activities such as fundraising for charity or raising awareness about the impacts of bullying. Choristers include girls and boys from the prep school, who give considerable time and are highly committed to serving the wider community through their regular and skilled singing at Tewkesbury Abbey.
55. Boarding staff ensure boarders have suitable responsibilities in their houses and enable boarders to understand financial responsibility, for example, through budgeting on how to spend pocket money when out on school trips. Boarders are well organised and follow the set routines for example by making their own beds and managing their laundry successfully. Leaders support pupils to manage their time in the boarding house effectively for example by completing their prep in a timely way in the well-organised boarding house study rooms.
56. Leaders' consistent approach throughout the early years, pre-prep and prep school encourages children to socialise with each other in a calm and cooperative way. Leaders in the early years develop children's understanding of right from wrong and skills of self-regulation so that they are able to recognise and determine their own emotional states of mind. Consequently, children in the early years are able to grow and develop in an enabling environment in which they feel safe and secure to explore and learn.

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

57. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

58. Trustees review and oversee the school's safeguarding provision and offer appropriate support and challenge to leaders when needed. Trustees regularly visit the school to speak with pupils and staff, and undertake an annual review of the effectiveness of the safeguarding policy and its implementation.
59. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities have clearly defined roles. A comprehensive safeguarding policy is available to parents and sets out the school's responsibilities and procedures fully in line with statutory guidance and local procedures. Leaders maintain records appropriately, monitoring and recording all concerns in appropriate detail as and when they arise. This enables efficient communication between safeguarding leaders who take prompt action and provide suitable support for pupils.
60. Leaders provide effective support for designated safeguarding leaders (DSLs), who act appropriately to make and review referrals, and work collaboratively with external agencies when necessary.
61. Safeguarding leaders use appropriate systems to filter and monitor pupils' use of the internet, and respond effectively to issues that arise. Teachers ensure pupils understand the risks associated with online activities so that pupils know how to stay safe.
62. Leaders prepare suitable risk assessments to safeguard pupils and provide effective training for staff. As a result, staff understand the contextual risks for the school and local area.
63. Leaders ensure all staff, including leaders and trustees, receive rigorous and regular training in safeguarding procedures and training is regularly updated in line with statutory guidance and local procedures.
64. Staff understand how to respond to safeguarding concerns such as those arising from pupil disclosures. Leaders' effective use of technology enables staff to make referrals or to report concerns easily and as soon as practicably possible. Leaders monitor and respond effectively to concerns raised.
65. When recruiting new staff, leaders make thorough checks of their suitability to work with children. They ensure that checks are undertaken efficiently and rigorously and recorded appropriately in accordance with guidance.
66. Leaders implement appropriate procedures to manage allegations against staff, liaising appropriately with external agencies when necessary. Staff recognise the need to report low-level concerns about colleagues including making self-referrals if appropriate.
67. Leaders in boarding actively promote the welfare of boarders by ensuring safeguarding arrangements are in place and actively implemented. Leaders ensure boarders have clear access to a range of appropriate adults who can offer support and help when needed.
68. Leaders ensure that all relevant records are transferred appropriately and securely when pupils transition to the next stage of their education, including when pupils change schools at non-standard transition points. This provides continuity of provision and minimises the risk of children missing education.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

69. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Dean Close Preparatory School
Department for Education number	916/6034
Registered charity number	1086829
Address	63 Lansdown Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL51 6QS
Phone number	01242 258000
Email address	dcpsoffice@deanclose.org.uk
Website	www.deanclose.org.uk
Proprietor	The Dean Close Foundation
Chair	Mrs Kathryn Carden
Headteacher	Mr Paddy Moss (Preparatory School) Mr James Cowling (Pre-Preparatory School)
Age range	2–13
Number of pupils	452
Number of boarding pupils	82
Date of previous inspection	19 to 21 March 2019

Information about the school

70. Dean Close Preparatory School is a co-educational day and boarding school located in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, on a site which it shares with its senior school. The school has two sections, each with its own headteacher: a pre-prep school for nursery age pupils to Year 2 and a prep school for pupils from Year 3 to Year 8. The school has a charitable foundation, whose trustees provide governance. Choristers from Tewkesbury Abbey are educated at the school.
71. Boarders are accommodated in three boarding houses, one of which is for male and female pupils aged 7 to 10 years of age. The other two house offer single-sex accommodation for male and female pupils between 10 and 13.
72. There are 80 children in the early years comprising two Nursery classes and two Reception classes.
73. The school has identified 70 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
74. English is an additional language for 17 pupils.
75. The school states its aims are to provide a loving, inclusive environment that develops pupils' characters as well as giving each child a high-quality, imaginative, well-rounded education that blends good academic performance with real achievement in their individually discovered talents. It seeks to be inclusive, encouraging participation for all in sport, music, drama and other co-curricular activities, while recognising and rewarding individual excellence. It aims to prepare pupils for the future, by developing their skills of collaboration, creativity, compassion, courage and critical thinking.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

6 – 8 February 2024

76. A team of five 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 trustees
- 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.

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**.

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