



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Birkdale School

May 2023

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School's Details

School	Birkdale School		
DfE number	373/6005		
Registered charity number	1018973		
Address	Birkdale School Oakholme Road Sheffield South Yorkshire S10 3DH		
Telephone number	0114 266 8408		
Email address	enquiries@birkdaleschool.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Peter Harris		
Chair of governors	Mr Paul Houghton		
Proprietor	Birkdale School		
Age range	11 to 18		
Number of pupils on roll	565		
	Seniors	354	Sixth Form 211
Inspection dates	10 to 12 May 2023		

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Birkdale School is an independent day school located in Sheffield. Originally registered as a school for male pupils it continues to educate male pupils only from the ages of 11 to 16 years. The sixth form has been co-educational for the last 25 years. The school, together with Birkdale Preparatory School, is a charitable foundation overseen by a governing body.
- 1.2 Birkdale Preparatory School was inspected separately at the same time.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school's Christian faith underpins its core values of care and respect for all, commitment to each other and to the school, and the pursuit and celebration of excellence. The school aims to give all pupils a strong academic education, while developing them as rounded individuals prepared for their wider role as responsible citizens willing to serve the community.

About the pupils

- 1.4 A large majority of pupils live in the city of Sheffield and its surroundings and mostly come from professional and business families. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average compared to those taking similar tests nationally. The school has identified 83 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), such as dyslexia, of whom 27 receive additional specialist help. One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 49 pupils, of whom four receive additional support for their English. Data used by the school identifies 83 pupils as being the more able in the school's 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. 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. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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](#).

Key findings

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

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 At GCSE in the years 2019 to 2022, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2019 to 2022 have confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

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

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 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

2.13 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.

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 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.

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

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 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.

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

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 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.

2.20 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. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
S1	Year 7
S2	Year 8
S3	Year 9
S4	Year 10
S5	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13

Key findings

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

- Pupils demonstrate excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of their learning.
- Pupils are competent and confident users of digital technology.
- Pupils are highly articulate communicators who express themselves clearly both verbally and in writing and listen to each other effectively.
- Pupils widen their learning in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and societies, many of which they lead themselves.
- Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning within and beyond the curriculum.

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

- Pupils show high levels of self-awareness, self-confidence and resilience.
- Pupils celebrate the diversity of the school and display excellent qualities of respect and tolerance.
- Pupils exhibit a highly developed understanding and awareness of morality both personally and in a wider context.
- Pupils' spiritual understanding is extremely well developed.

- Pupils of all ages take the initiative in order to contribute willingly to the school and wider communities both locally and further afield.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

- Enable all pupils to enhance their academic outcomes by increasing opportunities for them to lead their own learning in lessons.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 Pupils across the school are inquisitive learners who acquire knowledge enthusiastically and value the skills which help them to develop understanding across a wide range of disciplines. They acquire subject-specific vocabulary rapidly and demonstrate effective linguistic skills. Pupils in Year 8 willingly extended their French vocabulary by seeking and translating phrases about daily life which were placed around the classroom. GCSE and A-level work is characterised by a confident use of advanced terminology, whether analysing a poem, discussing macro-economics or eliciting the key aims of socialism and liberalism. Pupils' technical skills are highly developed, as demonstrated by Year 7 design and technology (DT) pupils who designed and created a stand for a camping saucepan and by outstanding examples of innovative design projects. Pupils use prior knowledge skilfully to improve their understanding. In Year 10 religious studies, pupils' excellent biblical knowledge enabled them to debate the issue of whether the bible is sexist highly effectively; GCSE biologists used their existing knowledge of ecosystems to much effect when investigating daisy populations on a school lawn. Pupils develop creative skills to a high level in visual and performing arts. Lower school pupils tackle their drawing tasks with much concentration and care, producing highly accurate observational drawings. GCSE and A-level artists use their well-developed skills to produce individual and creative pieces of art. Pupils successfully develop their musical and dramatic performance skills both within and beyond the curriculum.

3.6 Pupils achieve excellent results at GCSE. Those in 2022 showed a considerable improvement on results during 2020 and 2021 when centre- and teacher-assessed grades were awarded. In 2022 over half the pupils were awarded top grades of 8 and 9. Most pupils achieve beyond their expected levels. At A-level, very high levels of attainment in 2020 and 2021 have fallen back somewhat to levels comparable with those of 2019. In 2022 nearly half of pupils achieved A* and A grades and a large majority attained grades A* to B. The school's own assessment data show that pupils with SEND and EAL achieve results which are at least in line with their peers. These strong results are due to the commitment of the school's leadership and governance to promote academic rigour and effective preparation for examinations. When they leave school most pupils move on to their first choice of a wide range of courses and universities, including those with the most rigorous entry requirements. Others achieve apprenticeship placements of their choice. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses almost all parents agreed that teaching enables their child to make progress.

3.7 Pupils, including those with SEND and EAL, display excellent communication skills, making the most of all opportunities provided by teaching and pastoral staff, who positively encourage communication skills as a learning device. Pupils speak with confidence in lessons and in many other contexts, such as when giving assemblies, debating or delivering a talk in relation to project-based learning. Their ability to listen to each other is notable and is characterised by a clear and strong sense that all points of view should be heard to further develop everyone's understanding. This creates many instances of lively and cogent argument between pupils in which nuanced and complex ideas are explored. Year 10 pupils in drama explored their concerns about the education system and the pressure it creates for individuals whilst working on a devised piece of theatre. In GCSE English, pupils questioned each other

about the characteristics of romanticism and consequently developed their understanding of concepts such as being a 'noble loser'. Pupils also write with confidence and often include language and a depth of argument beyond their age-related expectations. In religious studies, Year 8 pupils produced highly accomplished pieces of writing with digital visual illustrations on diversity and disability, thus communicating their ideas in several different ways.

- 3.8 Pupils' numeracy skills in relation to their starting points are strong. Able mathematicians in the school demonstrate advanced skills and are encouraged to develop them beyond the confines of the examination syllabus being studied. Many pupils describe how their confidence has grown in response to effective teaching which emphasizes the joys of problem-solving and logical thinking. Year 10 pupils approached a problem of calculating the area and hypotenuse of triangles in different ways, some using Pythagoras' theorem and others trigonometry. Pupils studying A-level economics analyse market conditions and interpret data highly effectively in their studies of fiscal policies. Younger pupils apply their mathematical skills across the curriculum. They accurately graph rates of change in biology, complete calculations on current, voltage and resistance in physics, and compare the cost of various modes of travel in geography. Whilst able mathematicians apply their knowledge seamlessly across other subjects in the sixth form, some of those with weaker numeracy skills comment that they struggle and would value some further support.
- 3.9 Pupils are confident in their digital learning and make appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT) for presenting their work and supporting their learning in many subjects. This is due to the commitment of school leaders and governors to roll out a programme of digital devices for all. Pupils use these to store their work, access the course specifications, submit work and receive prompt feedback from staff. The use of ICT is particularly successful when pupils feel that they have the autonomy to decide which form of it best suits their learning preferences. In music, Year 8 pupils competently used software to produce a reggae song. Across all ages pupils are effectively using data loggers in science experiments and in computer science pupils are coding with confidence. In some subjects, pupils appropriately share ideas and log them in real time with each other so that they benefit from the contributions of all. In GCSE English, pupils streamed their ideas about a character in *Frankenstein* to each other and the teacher, consequently developing their thinking.
- 3.10 Pupils develop a wide range of study skills as they move through the school and are encouraged by staff to recognise their own successful ways of working. They develop their concentration and quiet focus in completing practical tasks in art and DT and use collaborative working to great effect in subjects such as religious studies and politics. Pupils apply themselves with determination to revision tasks in the run-up to examinations. They develop their skills of research, such as in history, where Year 10 pupils used online resources to investigate who Queen Elizabeth I could have married and why, synthesising their findings into a coherent argument. Year 12 pupils draw on a range of academic and other sources to analyse and support judgements in their A-level work and in their extended project qualifications. These include a wide range of topics such as leprosy in Nepal, the use of psychiatric assistance dogs and a comparison between communist and tsarist regimes between 1855 and 1953. Pupils apply strong reflective and evaluative skills and can hypothesise and try out new approaches. In sixth form DT, pupils created a range of different prototypes before choosing their final design, and mathematicians worked out possible ways to calculate the volume of a prism. The youngest pupils in the school can hypothesise about why, in medieval times, the English won battles against the French but ultimately lost lands. In the most effective lessons, pupils are given many opportunities to explore their own ideas and thus take the initiative in their learning. However, in some lessons, highly directed teaching limits pupils' opportunity and ability to try things out for themselves.
- 3.11 Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning across the curriculum and through their extra-curricular engagement. They are highly motivated and say this is in large part due to their close relationships with teaching and pastoral staff, whom, they say, always seek to help them maximise

their potential. Many pupils of all ages set up their own academic societies such as the law society which then help to determine their future pathways. They deliver assemblies on learning themes such as celebrating their own neurodiversity or demonstrating how technology has helped them overcome barriers. Pupils are aspirational and well-motivated learners who make every effort to catch up on any work missed and exhibit a determination to do as well as possible.

- 3.12 Pupils achieve success in many individual and group activities within and beyond school. Successes in sport include team successes in county competitions and individual achievements at county and national level in rugby, football, hockey, cricket, swimming, athletics, table tennis and cross country. Pupils can pursue a wide range of interests including scrabble, circus skills, myths and mountain biking, to name but a few. They enjoy opportunities to develop their performance skills in whole school productions such as *Grease*, the 'variety show' and the young performers platform. Artists regularly take part in the Sheffield Young Artists' Initiative and have their work exhibited across the city. Pupils achieve highly in a wide range of academic competitions in which they regularly win awards, for instance recent Arkwright awards for engineering and successes in Maths and Science Olympiads.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils display high levels of self-understanding, self-esteem and self-confidence within the classroom and more widely around the school. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that the school strongly supports them to be the best possible version of themselves. Consequently, they develop the necessary resilience to aim for long term success both within the curriculum and in their extra-curricular activities. Pupils are unafraid of failure, regarding it as a positive step, and they respond well to feedback given by staff who assist in helping them identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Younger pupils in their interviews cited activities in drama, art, music and DT as strong factors in increasing self-confidence. Pupils of all ages feel that the school is a safe place for them to pursue their own interests and passions. As a result, many pupils set up their own societies and clubs and run them highly effectively, consequently developing their own and others' interests. In their questionnaire responses, almost all parents agreed that the school helps their child to be more confident and independent.
- 3.15 Pupils are excellent decision-makers who can think for themselves and make well-judged choices about their daily lives in school. For example, they may choose to attend academic clinics, get involved in sports teams, join The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) or help to run a society. In addition, older pupils say they are well supported in their decision-making processes about future education and career pathways, attending a range of focused career events and programmes. They speak highly of the support provided by skilled careers advisors and tutors so that they can make mature and effective decisions. Older pupils also relish opportunities to help those in younger years make their decisions about subject choices and interests to pursue. In this environment of mutual support pupils willingly choose to take up positions of responsibility, deciding to apply to be school leaders or a member of one of the school councils.
- 3.16 Pupils throughout the school are highly reflective and think deeply about philosophical and religious ideas. They enjoy the challenge of rigorous debate about moral and spiritual issues. During religious studies lessons they are given many opportunities to explore spiritual considerations. They can discuss complex religious ideas with confidence and insight. For instance, Year 10 pupils discussed the importance of morality and belief in defining whether someone was a Christian. Pupils understand the common ground of many religions, such as care for those less fortunate than oneself. They commented during interviews that the school's strong Christian ethos does not restrict their thinking about spiritual matters in any way. Instead, they say that it instils in them the core school values of respect, integrity, humility, courage and compassion which are strongly promoted by the school's leadership and governance. They say that they 'think bigger' such as when taking part in a visit to

Nepal and engaging with people who have far fewer material possessions. Successful musical and drama performances, seen in videos in the work scrutiny, and observations of pupils working in art and DT show the way in which pupils can absorb themselves in the creative process and consequently find moments of tranquillity in their busy lives. They readily engage with the natural world as exemplified by the work of the pupil-led eco-committee who are driving forward their agenda to make the school more sustainable.

- 3.17 Pupils have a strong sense of the importance of right behaviour. They are courteous and sensitive to the feelings of others and have a high level of respect for their peers and their teachers. Pupils understand the necessity for any community, including their school, to have a system of rules in place to ensure that everyone is valued and secure. They readily recognise when they have made mistakes and correct their own behaviour. Pupils in the middle school council helped to design the new conduct cards which are used to implement the behaviour policy and so feel they have a vested interest in making it work. Pupils also consider moral dilemmas intelligently. Year 10 pupils in religious studies effectively debated the issue of whether violence can ever be justified in response to government injustice. Pupils in Year 11 produced well-argued written work in response to the ethical and moral dilemma of being a soldier, presented in a poem by Wilfred Owen. In their questionnaire responses, almost all pupils agreed that the school expects them to behave well.
- 3.18 Pupils are very socially aware and work together highly successfully both within their year groups and in their houses and societies where they collaborate across age groups. Younger pupils say that they feel privileged to be able to collaborate with more senior ones, whether working towards a common goal in a school production or preparing for the summer barbecue. They describe sports teams and societies as aspects of school life in which this sense of corporate endeavour is very strong. Within lessons, paired and group work assist pupils to make sense of their learning and they comment that this kind of work helps them to develop strong respect for each other's perspectives. In practical subjects such as DT, PE and music, pupils consider everyone's ideas and consequently raise the standard of everyone's work. In drama, Year 10 pupils worked together on a devised piece on the theme of refugees, exploring together their extreme difficulties and developing a deep understanding and empathy for them. Pupils create their own opportunities to work together in this way, whether driving sustainability such as in the 'eco committee' or just enjoying doing things together such as in the Scrabble and Warhammer clubs.
- 3.19 Pupils' contributions to the school and the wider community are excellent. They take on positions of responsibility willingly, displaying a strong commitment to the school's ethos of service to others which is strongly supported by leaders and governors. Younger pupils enthusiastically take up leadership opportunities to be prefects for their school section, saying that they value the chance to be positive role models for their peers. Sixth form pupils give of their time willingly to lead activities for younger pupils. For instance, Year 12 pupils organised a drama club for Year 8 in which they have prepared a film to welcome the new Year 7 to the school. Sixth form pupils embrace the opportunities to take part in community action projects such as volunteering in local primary schools, care homes and charity shops. Almost 150 pupils participate in DofE and welcome the opportunities it provides to be of service to others. Pupils are highly empathetic, and they translate this into action by raising considerable sums of money for charities such as their linked school in Nepal or, much closer to home, to fund air quality monitors around the school site. Each year an annual charity is selected by pupils, including this year a charity supporting homeless people in the city of Sheffield.
- 3.20 Pupils demonstrate substantial acceptance and celebration of diversity. They commented during interviews with inspectors that they are committed to making sure everyone is comfortable at school and accepted for who they are. The 'Diversity and Equality' pupil committee are helping to drive changes in attitudes and perceptions, including in the use of language around the LGBTQ+ community. Pupils in Year 7 wrote highly articulate explanations of how an item they had brought into school represented their identity. Pupils say that they value the work they do in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) to help them understand gender, identity, sexuality and neurodiversity

and they enthusiastically deliver assemblies on issues such as black history, and world faiths. Sixth form female pupils, who are a small minority, commented that male pupils are generally highly respectful of them.

- 3.21 Pupils say that they understand how to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing by balancing their studies with a range of other activities. They engage willingly and enthusiastically with the many opportunities for exercise both in team and individual sports and in outdoor education opportunities, including climbing and hiking in the Pennines. They confirm that they feel safe in their online behaviour and that PSHE lessons and sixth form enrichment help them learn how to stay safe physically in their lives beyond school. They highly value the support available to them to maintain good mental health from dedicated pastoral and medical staff, including the school counsellor. Middle school pupils spoke positively about their 'life skills' course, in which they learn a range of useful skills such as how to manage their finances and iron their clothes effectively.

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 the chair of governors and the safeguarding governor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies and form meetings. Inspectors visited 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

Mrs Kate McCarey	Reporting inspector
Mr Steven Winter	Compliance team inspector (Former head, SofH school)
Mrs Pat Clayfield	Team inspector (Former head, SofH school)
Mr Andrew Gillespie	Team inspector (Vice principal, SofH school)
Mr Ian Vallance	Team inspector (Deputy head, ISA school)