



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Bridgewater School

April 2022

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School's Details

School	Bridgewater School			
DfE number	355/6005			
Registered charity number	1105547			
Address	Bridgewater School Drywood Hall Worsley Road Manchester M28 2WQ			
Telephone number	0161 7941463			
Email address	admin@bwslive.co.uk			
Head	Mrs Judy Nairn			
Chair of governors	Mr Christopher Haighton			
Age range	3 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	465			
	EYFS	36	Prep	122
	Seniors	264	Sixth Form	43
Inspection dates	26 to 29 April 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Bridgewater school is a co-educational school located seven miles from the centre of Manchester. It has three sections, senior, preparatory and an Early Years Foundation (EYFS) setting. Since the previous inspection the school has expanded its facilities by installing outdoor gym equipment and, for the EYFS, a covered outdoor learning area. The school management team has been restructured and the provision for learning support across the school enhanced.
- 1.2 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school sets out to create a caring, family environment within which it encourages all its pupils to become learners for life who share pride in their own and others' work and achievements. It aims to develop its pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding and to learn sensitivity to the needs of others within school and in the world beyond.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Standardised tests show that the majority of pupils in the preparatory and senior departments are above the average of pupils taking the same tests nationally. Those in the sixth form are at the average of those in sixth forms nationally. The school has identified 85 pupils as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), mostly of mild to moderate dyslexia, dyspraxia or dyscalculia. Support is provided within the classroom and specialist support for eight pupils who need this. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Of the 27 pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), specialist support is provided for two as needed. The school supports those pupils who are more able by adapting the curriculum as required within the classroom and encouraging involvement in appropriate extra-curricular clubs. It is flexible in accommodating the training needs of pupils with a specific talent such as in performing arts or in sports.

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. 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](#), [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 In the prep school, 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 In the senior school, the school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2019 to 2021 confirm 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 education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, 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 well-being 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>
Kindergarten	Nursery

Key findings

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

- Pupils achieve good levels of success in academic examinations and extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils are articulate and confident communicators who can listen effectively and respectfully.
- Pupils' independence and resilience in learning is sometimes hampered by their over-reliance on their teachers' support.
- Pupils' approach to learning often lacks intellectual curiosity and ambition.

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

- Pupils develop good levels of self-confidence and self-esteem especially through their extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils have a very clear understanding of the importance of respecting the school's behavioural expectations.
- Some senior school pupils below the sixth form do not always fully recognise the long term consequences of the decisions they make about their approach to learning.
- Senior school pupils sometimes show a limited interest in contributing positively to their school and to the wider community.

Recommendations

3.3 The school should make the following improvements.

- Ensure pupils develop intellectual curiosity and academic rigour by providing sufficient challenge across all subjects.
- Improve pupils' resilience, independence and ability to take leadership in their learning when facing difficulties in their work.
- Improve pupils' understanding that the daily decisions they make are important in shaping their own future lives and relationships.

- Improve pupils' awareness of the importance to society and themselves of contributing actively to school life and the wider community.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.5 Pupils achieve good academic standards, evidence of the school's success in meeting its aims. The majority of children in the EYFS meet the early learning goals by the time they complete the reception year. Results at GCSE and A Level have been consistently good over the last three years with overall pass rates above 98%. In 2021, 61% of GCSE results were awarded top grades and 85% of A-Level results were at grade B or above. All those in the sixth form were successful in gaining places at their chosen universities. The majority of pupils make good progress from their starting points, many exceeding the results originally predicted. They are supported in this by the school's assessment processes which have been improved since the previous inspection and allow for swift identification of any emerging needs. Pupils with SEND or EAL are effectively supported, so that they achieve in line with their ability and with their peers. There are no significant differences between the achievement of male and female pupils. A very large proportion of pupils and their parents expressed satisfaction with pupils' overall progress and academic attainment.
- 3.6 Pupils develop good levels of understanding and knowledge across the curriculum, encouraged by the supportive, family atmosphere of the school. Children in the EYFS learn swiftly in teacher led activities and in those they initiate themselves, for example in estimating measurements and writing a shopping list. Their motor skills develop well as they ride the tricycles and scooters with glee. Literacy skills develop well as pupils mature. Many pupils, including those in the prep, are enthusiastic readers and make good use of the resources provided by the school's investment in a virtual library. Good understanding of scientific concepts is evident across the school and pupils are confident mathematicians. Pupils reach good understanding of historical events, seen in lessons on the social structures of mediaeval England and on the relations between the UK and the USA in the 20th century. Geographical understanding also is good. For example, Year 11 pupils were able to describe clearly the processes behind the formation of a volcano. The lively artwork on display reveals the pupils' good creativity. Prep pupils enjoyed exploring the work of a contemporary artist and producing their own strikingly effective pieces in his style.
- 3.7 Pupils are confident communicators. Children in the Kindergarten showed strong oral skills in their role play games and those in Reception were able to write words with good letter formation and phonetically plausible spelling. Older pupils in prep can write at length and include good detail in their work, as seen in older prep school pupils' work on *Macbeth*. Senior pupils' written skills develop well, so that they can write concise answers to exam questions as well as at appropriate length in essay responses. They have a secure grasp of suitable subject specific terminology and vocabulary, although they are less secure in using more sophisticated vocabulary in the place of colloquialisms. They are articulate in conversation and enjoy expressing their opinions when allowed to do so. Below the sixth form, such occasions are often limited by teaching which focuses on brief answers to direct questions rather than seizing opportunities for discussion or debate. Across the school, the majority of pupils have good listening skills and pay respectful attention as their teachers or classmates speak. Pupils in Year 11 and in the sixth form were observed discussing and challenging others' opinions intelligently.
- 3.8 Pupils are competent mathematicians and comfortable in applying their mathematical knowledge to other areas of the curriculum. Children in the EYFS were accomplished at executing the measuring necessary to create the squishy jelly and sharing the task of filling giant tea pots to see who could get the water higher. Pupils in Year 3 showed good numeracy skills in adding and subtracting multiples of ten from a three-digit number. Some prep pupils developed high levels of mathematical ability as shown during the inspection when some undertook the same level of the UK Maths Challenge as Year 7 pupils. Senior school pupils recognise that the skills they learn in mathematics lessons will be

valuable to them in later life and demonstrate good numeracy skills. Pupils in Year 7 confidently used their numerical skills in plotting points on a graph and measuring wood for a design technology (DT) task. Year 9 pupils confidently used calculators to solve problems involving angles in pie charts. In a Year 11 science lesson more able pupils were able to produce graphs and make accurate calculations, while others struggled and relied on teacher support or on simply copying from peers, showing limited resilience and application when challenged. Pupils in the Sixth form were able to apply probability formulae to create a simultaneous equation which they then solved by substitution. They were supported by teaching which gave them encouragement through skilful questioning.

- 3.9 Pupils across the school are confident in their use of information and communication technology (ICT). Children in Reception use digital cameras and learn basic programming skills confidently. Pupils in the prep show very confident skills, developed from an early age through a well-constructed programme of ICT lessons. They are given little opportunity to apply these skills across the wider curriculum, although they will occasionally research by using the portable devices in which governors have invested. Senior pupils enjoy the opportunities ICT presents to support their learning in research and games, as in practising their vocabulary in modern languages lessons. They can use a range of software packages for their work and appreciate the continuing use of the facility to submit and review their work online, a skill honed during periods of remote learning.
- 3.10 Pupils' aptitude in applying their study skills varies. Some show a good or better ability to pull together and analyse information, seen for example in prep pupils' research into Mayan art before producing their own Mayan masks. Senior pupils' comments in English lessons on the various characters in drama texts showed thoughtful reflection, as did Year 12 discussions of different psychological theories of learning. On occasion the pupils showed their ability to hypothesise, for example in predicting possible outcomes of a science experiment. At other times a lack of confidence in analysing information was evident and pupils were quick to turn to their teachers for answers. When a response was questions prompting further thought, many pupils were able to make progress independently. Often, however, the guidance was too precise to require the pupils to think more rigorously for themselves and pupils rarely asked probing questions. Pupils are highly appreciative of the support provided by their teachers but can lean on it too heavily, becoming passive learners as a result.
- 3.11 Pupils are proud of their success in the UK Maths Challenge, some seniors reaching Gold standard. They achieve highly in sport, creative endeavours and in extra-curricular competitions. Prep pupils are very successful in art, dance and quiz competitions. In sporting competitions with other independent schools, prep teams have been winners in a wide range of sports, and individual successes including in trampolining, skiing and in placements at football academies. The prep gardening club has earned the Royal Horticultural Society's level three gardening award and its members are working towards the next level. In the senior school, there have been regular successes in sporting competitions in football and netball. The majority of pupils in Year 9 have embarked on The Duke of Edinburgh's Award at bronze level. In previous years there have been successful sports and music tours in Europe, as well as school productions. Pupils from Year 7 to sixth form were excited to be involved in a production of *Matilda* during the inspection. Those with special talents are supported by and are a source of pride to the school. Pupils have been successful in auditions for professional engagement in theatre and television, as well as in high level sporting events including swimming and skiing.
- 3.12 The pupils demonstrate their good ability to work collaboratively; older pupils show a better ability to take leadership in activities than they do in the classroom. Children in the EYFS play together happily, helping each other, sharing toys and taking turns, with staff helping them negotiate as needed. Prep pupils collaborate and share ideas well, as seen when Year 4 were working together to better understand the character in their class reader. Senior school pupils can work well collaboratively and with focus. When given the opportunity they can explore ideas independently and enjoy doing so. However, they tend to seek help swiftly from teachers rather than face the challenge of working through complex problems on their own. Questionnaire responses showed that a minority of pupils across the school do not feel that all lessons are usually interesting. In some senior school lessons seen

below the sixth form, negative body language and lack of engagement of some pupils was observed, with occasional low-level disruption by irrelevant chatter. Such pupils showed limited academic ambition or self-motivation. Sixth form pupils, although they too lean heavily on staff for help, are far more motivated and eager to succeed. Their demeanour in lessons shows a decidedly positive attitude towards learning.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.14 The self-confidence and self-esteem of pupils is evident. The youngest children happily talk with visitors and show what they are doing, totally secure within the nurturing environment created by staff. In a phonics session they settled and focused well, showing good self-discipline. Older prep pupils also focus well in lessons and display resilience when facing challenges. They respond positively when given prompts about their work, seeing these as opportunities to improve. Pupils were warmly supportive of their friends as they collected their certificates in the weekly celebration assembly. They are well prepared to make the transition to the senior school.
- 3.15 Many senior school pupils develop a clear understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses as they mature, so that by the time they are in the sixth form they can identify why they are finding a particular task daunting. They can be resilient, for example saying that making a mistake is not failure but a stepping stone to success, and they are confident that they will succeed with their teachers' help. They can, however, rely too heavily on that help and show limited determination to work through academic problems on their own. Their self-confidence and self-belief grow most clearly in the extra-curricular activities they undertake such as sport or theatre. Pupils described how nervous they had been in initial rehearsals for *Matilda*. They said they had been pushed outside their comfort zones by the demands of their parts and their successful performances had given a great boost to their self-confidence.
- 3.16 In the prep school, pupils show a good ability to make decisions on a daily basis. Children in the EYFS confidently decide which activity they are going to pursue and with whom they will work. They make the most of the wide range of resources available to them and the ability to work outdoors in the covered area created since the previous inspection. Prep pupils are keen to act on the feedback given by their teachers and improve their work by responding to written comments and verbal prompts in numeracy lessons and reflecting on their word choices in English written work. Senior pupils were able to give clear rationale for their design choices in DT lessons and in mathematics lessons made choices about the level of challenge they wished to undertake. The majority of senior school pupils choose to involve themselves actively in lessons, making the decision that doing so will directly affect their longer term success. Some, however, have not made that link and choose instead to remain disengaged and not use their time fruitfully. Comments were made by some sixth-form pupils on key moments that made them realise the potential consequences of this attitude. They expressed their appreciation of the school's refusal to give up on them and the help given to engender change.
- 3.17 Prep pupils show a natural appreciation of the everyday surprises of life. The children in EYFS responded with delight and astonishment as chickpeas were whizzed up in a blender to make hummus. In a science lesson on plants growing from seed, pupils pondered where did the very first plant come from, showing the dawning of complex thought. They enjoy the beauty of their surroundings and their walks in the woods behind the school, as well as visits to various places of worship. They see the quality of family relationships as being more important than money or celebrity, a view also apparent in senior school pupils. In a Year 7 discussion on the ideas of heaven and hell pupils touched on the notion of free will, some saying humans are all puppets being moved around by a greater force. Older pupils spoke of the impact on them of art or the beauty of the Yorkshire Dales and some sixth-form pupils contribute notes regularly to the 'gratitude jar', reflecting on the small

things that bring joy to life. Others were reluctant to consider issues of non-material values and were wary of reflecting on larger philosophical concepts.

- 3.18 The pupils have a good understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Behaviour of pupils in the prep is invariably good; the common courtesies such as holding doors open are well observed and recognised in the 'good citizen' awards. Throughout the school pupils know the behavioural expectations of the staff and the consequences that follow should they ignore them. In the questionnaire a minority of pupils said that the school does not treat pupils fairly. Scrutiny of records, discussions and observations do not support this view; staff are consistent in their response to misdeeds. As pupils mature they come to realise the impact of their behaviour on others and to accept responsibility for their own behaviour. They say bullying is totally unacceptable and their moral awareness prompts them to report any unkindness to their teachers.
- 3.19 The majority of pupils work effectively with others and are aware of the impact on their own and other's school life. Social co-operation and collaboration is well developed across the prep school and they enjoy working together on projects such as raising funds for the adventure play area. In a personal, social and health education (PSHE) lesson, pupils worked very effectively in groups to create a vision of their ideal role model; they listened to each other's views and reached a consensus through respectful collaboration. Competitive sport is viewed positively by most pupils who thrive on the teamwork this requires of them. Pupils spoke enthusiastically of the experience of working on *Matilda* and of how it had developed their ability to work as a team. Sixth-form pupils took leadership roles behind the scenes and were instrumental in supporting a highly collaborative approach which ensured a successful production.
- 3.20 Many pupils describe the school appreciatively as a family and understand their responsibility for helping to support that atmosphere. Children in Reception were keen to be helpful in tidying up and in mopping up a spillage. Pupils act as buddies to their juniors, providing valuable support in class and in the playground. Both in prep and senior schools, pupils stand for election as members of the schools' pupil councils, knowing that they can make a difference to their school lives. Those Year 9 pupils working for their DofE award have enjoyed supporting prep pupils as part of their service element and have realised the difference this can make to others. Letters written in support of applications for the senior school posts of head pupils show pupils' wish to take responsibility and to contribute to the school. Some charitable ventures have been initiated by pupils, either through the school councils or as individuals. Many of the senior pupils clearly enjoy the fund raising activities but undertake them with a limited appreciation of the importance of such actions in contributing to society or in developing their own characters. The school is not fully meeting its aims in this area.
- 3.21 The pupils value the diversity of the school's community, seeing it as giving them a wider understanding of the world. They take pleasure in learning about different aspects of their own and other pupils' cultures. They have a good awareness of issues of equality. Prep pupils know the significance of figures such as Nelson Mandela and senior pupils helped to devise the school's anti-racism statements. They are very open and tolerant in their approach to differences and to those whose lifestyle and background may be different to their own. They say it is easy to be yourself in this school. They place a high value on showing support for others, regardless of background, gender, sexuality or ability.
- 3.22 Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of maintaining their physical and mental health. Conversations with EYFS children show their clear understanding of the need to wash their hands before eating and they manage their personal hygiene independently. Prep pupils know it is preferable to choose healthy foods such as fruit in preference to sugary treats or crisps. Pupils of all ages engage actively in sports lessons and clubs. Senior school pupils also understand the need to keep themselves healthy. All pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in the virtual world. They value the life skills being taught in the PSHE programme, including guidance on supporting their mental health. Sixth-form pupils enjoy the yoga and mindfulness sessions provided by staff, seeing these as useful means to maintain their well-being.

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

Mrs Colette Culligan	Reporting inspector
Mr Neil Walker	Compliance team inspector (Headmaster, GSA school)
Mr William Sawyer	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Susan Wallace-Woodroffe	Team inspector (Head, GSA school)