

School inspection report

12 to 14 November 2024

Alderley Edge School for Girls

Wilmslow Road

Alderley Edge

Cheshire

SK9 7QE

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 school's aim of producing confident, independent learners with enquiring minds permeates school life. Effective implementation of the school's 'BeMore' programme encourages educational endeavour and creativity both inside and outside the classroom. As a result, pupils develop into resourceful, resilient, reflective and curious young people.
2. Governors provide support for leaders and challenge them appropriately. They ensure that leaders have suitable skills and knowledge and that they fulfil their roles well. Leadership is effective and dynamic, enabling the school to meet the Standards consistently.
3. Policies comply with relevant legislation. They are regularly reviewed and revised by leaders and governors, who ensure that policies are implemented consistently.
4. Safer recruitment procedures are followed robustly to ensure the suitability of employees. Effective safeguarding policies and practices are in place. Pupils are confident that they are listened to when sharing any concerns with staff.
5. Staff in the early years know the children well. Their needs are identified quickly when they join the school and are met fully. High quality interactions with staff, and well-chosen activities, help children to make good progress.
6. Pupils enjoy school and are engaged, articulate and confident learners. Teachers are knowledgeable and demonstrate effective classroom management skills, with well-prepared lessons. Teaching in both the prep school and senior school is effective and enables pupils to achieve well. However, older pupils in the prep school, particularly those with higher prior attainment, are not always challenged enough in lessons. Where this is the case, pupils make less progress than they are capable of.
7. Pupils make good progress and are well supported by their teachers. They understand how to improve and are keen to achieve academic success. This is particularly evident in the sixth form. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are well catered for.
8. The school site provides a safe and comfortable learning environment for pupils. Pupils enjoy school and attend regularly and on time. Leaders embrace the recent government guidelines on improving attendance and give the matter a suitably high focus.
9. Pupils throughout the school are tolerant, courteous, respectful and mutually supportive of each other. They welcome leadership opportunities, which enhance their sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Throughout the school, pupils of all ages display an appropriate awareness, appreciation and understanding of diversity and different cultures.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that pupils in the prep school, particularly those with higher prior attainment, are challenged sufficiently throughout the curriculum so that they achieve as well as possible.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders and governors have a clear vision for the school which they implement effectively. They have high expectations and are determined that pupils achieve well. Leaders and governors balance this with a deep commitment to supporting pupils to develop as well-rounded individuals as well as supporting their physical, emotional and mental health. These aims are widely understood and clearly evident.
11. Leaders and governors have put highly effective systems in place that promote and monitor pupils' safeguarding, academic progress, mental health and wellbeing. Pupils throughout the school are nurtured and cared for in a setting that is inclusive and supportive. The trusting relationships and rapport between pupils and leaders enable pupils to express articulate, mature and balanced viewpoints when discussing their experiences within the school.
12. Governors have regular contact with leaders, staff and pupils. This ensures that they understand what is happening in the school on a day-to-day basis. Governors regularly check that leaders have the skills and knowledge they need and that they carry out their roles effectively. As a result, the Standards are met consistently.
13. Leaders have a rigorous approach to risk assessment throughout the school. Governors are fully aware of their role in ensuring that risk management is given a high priority. They monitor this area closely, ensuring that pupils' wellbeing is promoted both in and out of school. Leaders have a thorough understanding of how to identify, manage and reduce risks throughout the whole school including those that are not immediately obvious.
14. Leaders have established effective working links with external agencies so that, when required, information can be shared and appropriate support accessed for pupils. For example, leaders work closely with an educational psychologist and a speech therapist to help identify and address pupils' SEND, where appropriate.
15. Leaders in the early years provide a warm, attentive and thoughtful environment that promotes the progress and wellbeing of the children in their care. Leaders' deep understanding of the needs of very young children informs all aspects of the provision. The caring, nurturing ethos is understood and promoted well by the staff in the setting.
16. Leaders and governors evaluate the school's effectiveness thoroughly and regularly. They focus well on assessing the quality of provision from pupils' points of view. They identify the school's strengths and where there is further work to do. This gives them an accurate understanding of how well the school is doing. Leaders and governors use this information to identify key priorities for school improvement. The school's development plan is well thought out and followed closely.
17. The detailed accessibility plan demonstrates leaders' clear commitment to meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Reasonable adjustments are made to improve accessibility, when required, which are fully supported by governors.
18. The school's policies are well considered and cover all required areas. Leaders and governors are alert to changes in national guidance and statutory requirements. They review policies regularly and update them in line with these changes. Leaders and governors share policies with staff, parents and pupils, as appropriate. They check that policies are fully understood and implemented consistently.

19. Leaders implement the complaints policy effectively, promptly and appropriately. Detailed recording of complaints enables a swift response when actions are required and lessons are to be learned.
20. The school's website contains a wide range of relevant information for both current parents and prospective parents. Parents are provided with useful and informative annual reports about their children's attainment and progress. Leaders and staff make themselves available to parents so that questions and concerns are dealt with promptly. Leaders complete and return the required annual reports, and any other necessary information, for pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and are funded or partly funded by a local authority.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. The curriculum is broad, balanced and well structured. It provides pupils with knowledge and skills in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, aesthetic and creative areas of learning. The school offers a broad range of subjects at GCSE and A level. Other level three courses, such as a BTEC in sports leadership and an extended project qualification (EPQ), are also offered. Results at GCSE and A level are above the national average.
23. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and a passion for their subjects. They are effective role models in the classroom. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and encourage them to be careful, thorough and methodical in their work. Teaching is assured and confident. Relationships between pupils and staff are based on trust and respect. Pupils respond positively and display a keen love of learning. Pupils make good progress during their time at the school.
24. Planning is effective and learning is developed in a sensible sequence. This enables pupils to master one skill before moving on to the next and provides cohesion in their learning. Lessons incorporate a variety of appropriate and engaging activities and time is used effectively. Teachers use resources well to enhance learning, including appropriate use of technology. For example, in science, timelapse photography is used to demonstrate key processes such as diffusion. Effective classroom management ensures pupils focus and behave well in lessons.
25. Children enjoy their learning and make good progress in the early years. Teaching is interesting and exciting. As a result, children remain interested throughout adult-led activities and sustain interest in the tasks they are given to do. Teachers focus well on helping children to develop their communication and language skills. They also enable children to develop early literacy and numeracy skills so that they are ready to move on to Year 1.
26. Teaching is usually matched well to pupils' needs and abilities. Teachers' explanations and the work pupils are given to do is typically pitched at the right level. Effective questioning techniques encourage pupils to think for themselves. However, in the prep school, some lessons and activities lack sufficient challenge, particularly for those pupils with higher prior attainment. Where this is the case, pupils' progress is less consistent.
27. Pupils are given constructive feedback about their work, with clear explanations. This enables pupils to be reflective and resilient learners who are comfortable articulating their strengths and areas for improvement. The encouraging feedback pupils receive instils confidence and a sense of pride and achievement.
28. The school measures pupils' starting points when they join the school to gain an accurate understanding of each pupil's strengths and areas for development. Evaluation of pupils' progress, using regular assessment points throughout the year, feeds into the detailed reports that are provided to parents. Teachers use assessment information to plan what and how they will teach future lessons. This supports pupils to learn effectively.
29. The needs of pupils who have SEND are supported effectively and sensitively. Detailed 'pen portraits' are formulated to ensure staff know pupils' individual needs and how best to support them. Staff use the pen portraits to promote good progress and ensure that teaching methods and work set are appropriate to meet pupils' needs.

30. Pupils who speak EAL are provided with additional support for speaking, listening and writing. They quickly achieve fluency in English. Pupils receive high-quality support and make consistently good progress across the school.
31. Throughout the school, pupils' academic experiences are enriched by the wide range of additional clubs, activities and clinics available at lunchtime and after school. This extensive programme of musical, sporting, recreational, creative and intellectual activities enhances pupils' social skills, wellbeing and personal development. Pupils engage well with the programme and take much pleasure and enjoyment in doing so.

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

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

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

33. Pupils are polite, self-confident and reflective. Effective behaviour and anti-bullying policies are in place that pupils understand well. Bullying and poor behaviour are rare. Such incidents are taken seriously and dealt with quickly and appropriately, with suitable follow-up support provided. Pupils act as anti-bullying ambassadors. They present their ideas about how to prevent and report bullying at house meetings across the school. This develops the anti-bullying ambassadors' self-esteem and self-confidence as well as other pupils' self-knowledge and self-awareness.
34. Children in the early years are given plentiful opportunities to explore the outdoor environment, including the woodland area, such as making 'leaf kebabs' and looking for minibeasts. This contributes positively to their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Play areas are well maintained and provide a stimulating environment for children to learn through play.
35. The chaplaincy is the focal point of the spiritual life of the school. It encourages a united community where respect and tolerance prevail. Pupils learn about the major world religions and develop a firm grasp of their key tenets and characteristics. They use this knowledge as they learn about wider spiritual matters. For example, in Year 8, pupils develop an effective understanding of concepts of existence, and what stays the same and what changes as we grow older, while learning about reincarnation in the Buddhist faith.
36. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE) programme is appropriate and well planned. It is taught throughout the school, including in the sixth form, and is delivered by specialist teachers. Staff create an atmosphere which encourages pupils to ask questions and engage in discussion. The PSHE and RSE curriculum covers a wide range of appropriate issues such as resilience, equality and health and wellbeing.
37. As part of the PSHE programme, pupils are taught about the ways that people can be different from each other, such as race or religion. They learn that everyone should be treated with respect and should not be judged on their personal characteristics. Pupils are respectful and tolerant of others. They celebrate diversity and show a sensitive awareness of other people's needs.
38. Pupils are encouraged to be physically healthy. All pupils take part in regular physical exercise, either in team sports or for leisure. The high quality physical education curriculum is taught effectively by skilled staff and meets pupils' needs well. Pupils enjoy the high quality, nutritious food provided by the school's catering team.
39. Pupils are well supervised throughout the school day, including in the early years. First aid facilities and provision are appropriate. Staff are aware of the routines and practices around first aid and all staff are first aid trained. All early years and prep school staff are trained in paediatric first aid.
40. Pupils know where to go to seek help, guidance or someone to talk to. They can name a variety of trusted adults they could turn to, to support their mental health and emotional wellbeing, should they have any concerns. Pupils are very positive about the wellbeing hub and see it as a safe place to access support and for quiet self-reflection.

41. Thorough procedures ensure that the admission and attendance registers are well kept and current guidance is followed. Staff promptly follow up and investigate any absences, taking further action when necessary. They check that they know where pupils are moving on to when they leave the school. When pupils leave the school at non-standard times, leaders inform the appropriate local authority.
42. The buildings, classrooms and play areas are well maintained with appropriate risk assessments in place, as well as termly fire drills. Areas of high risk, for example, science laboratories and design technology classrooms, are kept securely, with sharp items locked away and appropriate cut-off switches in place. All aspects of health and safety management are appropriate and rigorously adhered to. Pupils are taught in a safe and secure environment.

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

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

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

44. The school's 'BeMore' programme is at the heart of all its work. Leaders have identified eight attributes, including being responsible, resilient and communicative, that they see as being fundamental to pupils' future success and happiness. Pupils are always encouraged to 'be more' in everything they do. Pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem are developed well during their time at the school.
45. The curriculum teaches pupils about equality and diversity issues effectively, particularly through the PSHE and religious education programmes of study. Pupils learn about different faiths, cultures and traditions as well as the ways that people can be different, such as race, disability and sexual orientation. Staff actively seek opportunities to promote pupils' understanding of inclusion as an integral part of the curriculum. For example, in art, pupils are given the opportunity to experience painting from the perspective of a blind artist by wearing a blindfold as they work. Pupils exhibit sensitivity and tolerance towards others and celebrate the diversity within the school community. The pupil-led equality, diversity and inclusion committee plays a key role in developing pupils' understanding and self-awareness in this area.
46. Pupils are helped to develop a secure understanding of right and wrong through planned elements of the curriculum, particularly in PSHE. Staff also take full advantage of teaching opportunities that arise incidentally.
47. Pupils in the senior school are provided with one-to-one impartial guidance by a specialist careers lead. There is a biennial careers fair that is open to pupils throughout the school. Pupils receive talks from past pupils and specialists in various fields of work to support their career choices. Pupils are well informed about the wide range of opportunities after leaving school. This includes universities, other providers, apprenticeships and the world of work.
48. Pupils are highly aware of social inequality. They express this through the work of the charity committee and its fund-raising initiatives, such as 'Children in Need' and a Christmas 'shoebox' appeal. Pupils contribute to the local community through the 'be more' programme and volunteer to work in local residential care homes.
49. Through PSHE and other elements of the curriculum, assemblies and chaplaincy, pupils learn about what it means to be a global citizen. Pupils learn about past events and how they affect issues in the modern day. Leaders provide useful opportunities for pupils to discuss matters of importance to them in a supportive and constructive way.
50. The school promotes fundamental British values, such as respect and individual liberty, effectively. Children start to learn about rules as soon as they join the early years. This develops as they move through the school so that senior pupils have a thorough understanding of the importance of law and order, both nationally and internationally. Pupils are taught about key public services and institutions such as the National Health Service and the Houses of Parliament. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern British society.
51. Economic education is planned and taught well, from the early years onwards. Pupils learn about aspects of financial education through curricular topics in business, economics and in PSHE. Children

in the early years 'spend money' in their role play and learn to recognise coins. Senior pupils are taught about mortgages, credit cards and budgeting. Pupils are given opportunities to develop their entrepreneurial skills and their understanding of small businesses through, for example, creating a website for a bakery.

52. The school supports pupils' social development well from the time they join the school. Children in the early years develop their social skills through their free play activities and story time. They respond appropriately to other children around them and learn how to behave co-operatively and to share.

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

53. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

54. Safeguarding procedures are effective and well understood by staff. Pupils feel secure and happy in their school. They can identify a range of trusted adults they would approach if they were worried or concerned.
55. The safeguarding team, leaders, governors and staff are all appropriately trained. A culture of reporting and discussing concerns is firmly embedded. Staff know what to do if they are worried about a pupil or have a concern about the conduct of a governor or member of staff. A comprehensive annual safeguarding audit is carried out by governors and leaders which provides assurance about the quality of safeguarding practice as well as highlighting any areas for development. The audit also enables leaders and governors to be fully aware of any staff training requirements in this area.
56. Through the use of robust recording systems, incidents and low-level concerns are logged swiftly and monitored in appropriate detail. Suitable action is taken promptly in response to concerns that are raised. Links with external agencies, when applicable, are effective and ensure that pupils are safeguarded and protected from harm.
57. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. The PSHE curriculum, assemblies, form time and visiting speakers are used effectively to teach pupils key messages about issues such as water and road safety. Pupils are taught how to recognise and respond to online threats and inappropriate website searches, as appropriate to their age. The school has appropriate systems in place to filter digital material and monitor the use of personal devices to support pupils' safety online.
58. Systematic and rigorous recruitment procedures, in line with safer recruitment guidance, are in place. All staff are appropriately checked before starting work at the school. The school's single central record of these checks is maintained well and monitored closely by governors. Pupils are taught in a safe and caring environment.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Alderley Edge School for Girls
Department for Education number	895/6012
Registered charity number	1006726
Address	Alderley Edge School for Girls Wilmslow Road Alderley Edge Cheshire SK9 7QE
Phone number	01625 583028
Email address	schoolmail@aesg.co.uk
Website	www.aesg.co.uk
Proprietor	Alderley Edge School for Girls
Chair	Mrs Caroline Lowe
Headteacher	Mrs Caroline Wood
Age range	2 to 18
Number of pupils	377
Date of previous inspection	15 to 18 June 2021

Information about the school

60. Alderley Edge School for Girls is an independent day school located in Alderley Edge, Cheshire. It is registered as a single-sex school for female pupils. The school is a limited company by guarantee and is administered by a board of governors. The school comprises four sections: the early years, for children aged two to four years; the prep school, for pupils aged five to 11 years; the senior school, for pupils aged 11 to 16 years and the sixth form, for pupils aged between 16 and 18 years. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors and a new headmistress were appointed in September 2024.
61. There are 21 children in the early years, comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
62. The school has identified 151 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Three pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. English is an additional language for 25 pupils.
64. The school states its aims are to produce confident, independent learners with inquiring minds that foster creativity, intellectual curiosity and a passion for lifelong learning, and who will fulfil their academic potential and succeed in life beyond school. The school aims to develop pupils who have a well-developed moral compass with awareness, empathy and a genuine concern for others.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

12 to 14 November 2024

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

66. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

67. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
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