

School inspection report

24 to 26 September 2024

Exeter Cathedral School

The Chantry

Palace Gate

Exeter

EX1 1HX

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. Leaders understand their roles and responsibilities well and work effectively to promote pupils' wellbeing. They ensure that the school culture remains in line with the school's aim of creating a nurturing environment in which individuals can flourish. The curriculum supports pupils' development of skills and understanding across the broad range of subjects. Staff modify the curriculum effectively to meet individual pupils' needs, such as for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or to accommodate individual pupils' musical schedules, to support pupils' learning and good progress.
2. Music is embedded across the school. Staff have shaped an inclusive approach where all pupils are involved through the curriculum and have opportunities for performance. Teachers provide effective support for pupils, including those with high prior attainment, and pitch teaching to their learning needs.
3. Pupils' self-esteem, self-confidence and self-knowledge flourish as a result of warm relationships between staff and pupils and the nurturing culture of the school. They also develop because of the encouraging and effective feedback provided by teachers.
4. In the early years setting children are encouraged to work together and support one another with an emphasis on the importance of polite manners and consideration. Staff utilise the resources and environment effectively to develop children's ability to learn and make choices with confidence.
5. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme effectively develops pupils' understanding of their emotions and how to manage these. The relationships and sex education (RSE) programme contains suitable content and develops pupils' understanding of healthy relationships and respecting others.
6. The school provides pupils from the early years upwards with effective economic education that develops their understanding in this area well.
7. Leaders maintain an effective safeguarding culture where staff are aware of their responsibilities and respond appropriately should a concern be raised. Leaders provide staff with regular training and check their understanding of this methodically. Governors exercise effective oversight of safeguarding and ensure that the school complies with any changes to statutory requirements.
8. At the start of inspection, the attendance policy did not reflect recent changes to current statutory guidance. The school remedied this during the inspection.

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 all policies remain up to date and in line with any changes to current statutory guidance.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders promote and model the school's values effectively. They ensure that the school's aims and expectations are well known across all year groups. Pupils in the pre prep know the 'golden habits' that they are expected to emulate. Older pupils have a clear understanding of the learning behaviours which they are expected to apply habitually, owing to effective reinforcement of these behaviours through displays, assemblies and form time activities.
10. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school through regular visits, meetings with staff, observing lessons and receiving leaders' presentations. They provide appropriate challenge to leaders through a committee structure which focuses on key areas of provision. This ensures that leaders promote pupils' wellbeing effectively and understand and implement their duties so that the Standards are met.
11. Leaders in the early years provide staff with effective guidance to help enable children learn well and make good progress.
12. Leaders undertake extensive and effective self-evaluation in a consultative process involving a range of stakeholders, using surveys and regular face-to-face forums. A detailed development plan is in place and leaders communicate with parents and staff effectively about the strategic direction of the school. Subject leaders identify areas for development and implement improvement strategies, such as guiding staff in teaching the recently revised personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme.
13. All required information is provided for parents on the website and by request. Parents receive regular reports on their children's progress. Leaders provide the local authority with the required information relating to any funded pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
14. Leaders have the skills and understanding to manage risk effectively, including risks which are harder to spot. Risk assessments are in place for pupils walking in the streets between school buildings and visits further afield, in addition to those for the school's premises, activities and relating to individual pupils' needs. Risk assessments include appropriate measures to mitigate against any potential risks that have been identified. Governors' oversight of risk management ensures that this provision is regularly reviewed.
15. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act and guards effectively against any pupil being subject to discrimination. Leaders have established a culture where diversity is respected. An appropriate accessibility plan is in place and subject to termly review and revision.
16. School leaders work effectively with external agencies in safeguarding pupils and supporting pupils who have SEND or an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
17. Leaders implement a clear and suitable complaints procedure. Leaders respond to any complainants within published timescales and keep a detailed record of complaints and any actions taken in response to these. Leaders monitor complaints for any trends that may need consideration.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders plan the curriculum effectively. Schemes of work for different subjects feature clearly articulated expectations for pupils' progression. The curriculum for the youngest children is highly tailored to their individual needs and interests, while the oldest pupils are supported effectively by teaching planned to develop pupils' analytical skills and prepare them for the likely academic demands of their senior or secondary schools.
20. Teachers are knowledgeable and passionate about what they teach. They communicate clearly and enthusiastically about their subjects to the pupils in well-planned lessons to draw out learning points and motivate pupils' interest. Teaching challenges pupils to think carefully about the aspects of the subject being explored. Constructive and focused feedback from teachers provides pupils with clear guidance about how to improve their work. Pupils progress well as a result. Leaders' oversight ensures that no teaching undermines fundamental British values such as those of mutual respect and tolerance.
21. Pupils make good progress in English as a result of the use of well-tailored resources and effective and focused questioning from teachers which prompts pupils to develop their analysis of literary texts. In well-planned lessons pupils studying modern foreign languages learn about key vocabulary of particular languages and how to use this in practice.
22. Academic leaders employ a robust tracking system which informs teachers' understanding of the progress made by their pupils. Subject leaders monitor the achievement of different cohorts of pupils, including choristers, and use their evaluation to generate targeted support when required. Teachers adapt their provision in response to needs identified by assessment data. This contributes to pupils' good progress.
23. Pupils make good progress in mathematics as a result of well sequenced lessons and clear and encouraging feedback from teachers that helps pupils to view errors as an aid to learning. Clear mathematical explanations facilitate pupils using their mathematical skills across the curriculum such as in mapwork.
24. Teaching in the early years is adapted to support individual children's needs. Teachers plan lessons and activities which build on the children's interests and develop their curiosity and knowledge. Children make good progress from their starting points.
25. Leaders provide pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) with effective support for their English where this is required. Teachers adapt and use pertinent resources, such as word banks, to enable this group of pupils to access the curriculum effectively. Teachers use grouping strategies effectively so that pupils who need support with their English actively practice their developing language skills. As a result, pupils who speak EAL develop confidence and skill in the use of English.
26. Leaders provide effective support for pupils who have SEND, both within lessons and through additional tuition. Teachers make effective use of pupil passports that identify targets for individual pupils to adapt their teaching to the pupils' needs. Teaching assistants provide additional support for particular pupils when this is required. The support that the school provides enables pupils who have SEND to make good progress from their starting points.

27. The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, ranging from the 'country club' in the pre-prep school where the children extend their geographical learning, to those exploring coding or ancient history. The wide range of music clubs available for pupils of all levels of musical ability and interest furnishes pupils with skills including those for composition and ensemble playing.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. The PSHE programme develops pupils' ability to recognise and regulate their emotions. Pupils learn about the effects of inappropriate use of social media and explore issues such as peer pressure and how to guard against it. The RSE curriculum is well planned to prepare pupils for each next stage of their personal development. Younger pupils learn about what makes a good friend, whilst older pupils discuss issues surrounding gender identity. In each case, pupils are helped to raise questions and so develop their understanding. The curriculum returns to key topics in age-appropriate lessons. Pupils are introduced to key concepts when young and develop their understanding of issues such as consent and puberty. The PSHE and RSE programmes contribute to pupils' understanding of the importance of mutual respect and the importance of accepting the protected characteristics, such as race, sexual orientation and belief, that are part of people's identities.
30. The school supports pupils who are choristers with the provision of a specialist tutor whose oversight helps them to balance their commitments effectively. Pastoral staff have the knowledge to support choristers' emotional wellbeing.
31. Behaviour in the school is good. Should an incident occur, it is managed effectively through the use of a sanctions system which focuses on pupils reflecting upon their behaviour. Leaders make effective use of an online system to track and inform staff about any pastoral concerns so that they can provide support as needed.
32. Pupils develop their spiritual awareness through religious education lessons which explore different world faiths and viewpoints.
33. The physical education (PE) programme fosters pupils' enjoyment of sport and physical activity successfully through exposing them to a range of sports and experiences such as dance. Children in the early years are provided with a varied range of activities which help develop their fine and gross motor skills. Older pupils make good progress in PE because of their teachers' clear communication of their subject knowledge. Pupils who attain highly in sport are supported in progressing to high level competitions by specialist coaching.
34. An emotionally healthy lifestyle is promoted by leaders through the provision of quiet classroom areas and the support available from the 'wellbeing room'. The PSHE programme enhances pupils' awareness of the importance of looking after mental health and develops their ability to reflect on their own mental health and what might be affecting it at any given time.
35. The anti-bullying strategy is effective. Pupils are educated about the harmful nature of bullying and develop their awareness of the difference between bullying and unkindness. Leaders respond appropriately to the rare incidents that do occur, including by providing support to pupils affected. Pupils are confident that should an incident occur there are supportive staff to whom they can turn.
36. Pupils are appropriately supervised whilst on the school site and on visits and fixtures through effective deployment of sufficient staff. In the early years, ratios are adhered to appropriately and children always kept within sight and or sound of an adult.

37. Attendance and admissions registers are appropriately maintained in line with recent changes to current statutory guidance. However, when the inspection commenced, the attendance policy did not reflect current requirements. Leaders rectified this during the inspection. The school informs the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times.
38. First aid procedures are effective, including during any off-site visits. Any first aid or medication is administered appropriately. A sufficient number of staff are trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid. There are appropriate medical facilities onsite.
39. The school has effective health and safety and fire safety arrangements. All equipment is serviced and checked regularly. Fire risk assessments are in place across the school sites and regularly reviewed. Staff conduct regular fire evacuation drills which are monitored for their efficiency. Leaders commission external audits of health and safety and fire safety and act on any advice received. As a result, the school's premises and accommodation are well maintained and provide a suitable learning environment for pupils.

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

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

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

41. The school develops pupils' appreciation of diversity and respect for others effectively. British values, such as those of mutual respect and individual liberty, are promoted through PSHE lessons, assemblies and displays. Pupils learn about issues such as prejudice and human rights. The religious education (RE) programme widens pupils' knowledge of diverse religions and world views. Pupils are encouraged to express their views and show appropriate consideration towards those who hold opinions different from their own.
42. The culture of the school cultivates a sense of self-awareness and an appreciation of the needs of others. Leaders and staff model high levels of respect and consideration, which are then shown across the community. The school educates pupils about the importance of positive social behaviours from an early age. For example, children in the early years learn to behave courteously and understand the importance of positive manners, such as holding a door open for others. Older pupils learn about how modelling good behaviour and treating others with consideration supports the whole social group.
43. Teaching in PSHE and themes explored in assemblies and tutor groups contribute to pupils' development of a sense of right and wrong, including through discussions and debates about ethical issues. Older pupils debate topical issues and explore historical injustices. They explore the ethical issues and principles of equality raised in topics explored in Black History Month and in connection with International Women's Day.
44. Pupils are effectively prepared for each stage of transition as they move through the school. Children in the early years are supported in their move to Year 1 by trial visits and clearly explanations of Year 1 expectations and how their experience is likely to change. Older pupils receive appropriate support and individual guidance to help them prepare for senior or secondary school life and any entry examinations and processes that they might experience. The 'futures guidance' provision includes consideration of possible types of future work and the pathways towards them, including through a careers day and the Year 8 careers programme.
45. The school develops pupils' knowledge of and respect for British institutions, the rule of law and democracy effectively. Visiting speakers have included a judge and an MP. Older pupils participate in reconstructed court cases to develop their understanding of the role of barristers, the judge and the jury, and the principle of a fair trial. Forums such as the school council, the food committees and the eco council, involve pupils in the democratic process through electing pupils to represent their classmates and voting to adopt initiatives that have been discussed at meetings.
46. The school teaches about economic matters effectively. Younger pupils learn about money, coins and different ways of paying. Older pupils learn about the difference between wanting and needing things and how to apply this to budgeting. Pupils undertake a project that requires them to set budgets for businesses such as a theme park and calculate ticket prices, costs, profits and outgoings. Pupils begin to learn about how the housing market works.
47. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils of all ages to undertake both formal and informal roles of responsibility; these range from being 'helpful hedgehogs' in the pre-prep to Year 8 pupils acting as heads of school. Pupils in Years 6 to 8 regularly volunteer to support and play with pre-prep

pupils before the start of school or to become their 'reading buddies'. In this way both the youngest children and older pupils offer practical support to their peers.

48. Pupils develop a sense of responsibility towards wider society through involvement in local citizenship projects and initiatives. Pupils participated in a beach clean and have raised money for a defibrillator for the local hospice and for Christmas boxes for those in need. They support other children through fundraising for a surf therapy charity.

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

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

Safeguarding

50. The school implements its suitable safeguarding policy and procedures effectively. Leaders and staff maintain a culture of vigilance and fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff receive regular safeguarding training. They understand the importance of reporting any potential safeguarding concerns. The school has appropriate arrangements for responding to any allegations or concerns about staff that may arise. Leaders with safeguarding responsibility are appropriately trained for their role. They respond to any safeguarding concerns effectively, including liaising effectively with relevant external agencies, seeking advice and referring concerns to them when appropriate. Safeguarding leaders keep suitable records of any safeguarding concerns and decisions made and actions taken in relation to these.
51. Governors monitor the safeguarding policy and procedures effectively. The nominated safeguarding governor meets twice termly with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and with pupils and other staff. Governors receive appropriate safeguarding training
52. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to share any worries. Pupils from the early years upwards know there is a range of adults available to help them.
53. Pupils learn how to stay safe online through PSHE and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons and guidance in assemblies and form time. The school's filtering and monitoring system alerts leaders to any online activity which may be inappropriate so that they can respond promptly.
54. All required safer recruitment checks are made before staff, including Cathedral staff who have contact with pupils, governors or volunteers, begin working at the school or with pupils. An appropriate single central record of recruitment checks is effectively maintained and monitored.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Exeter Cathedral School
Department for Education number	878/6000
Registered charity number	1151444
Address	Exeter Cathedral School The Chantry Palace Gate Exeter Devon EX1 1HX
Phone number	01392 255298
Email address	reception@exetercs.org
Website	www.exetercathedralschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Exeter Cathedral School Ltd
Chair	Mr Charles Beer
Headteacher	Mr James Featherstone
Age range	3 to 13
Number of pupils	176
Date of previous inspection	21 February 2024

Information about the school

56. Exeter Cathedral School is an independent co-educational day school located in Exeter city centre. The school was founded in 1179 to educate male choristers. The school began to accept pupils who were not choristers in the 1960s. In 1994 the school became fully co-educational. Formerly also a boarding school, the school closed its boarding provision from September 2024. The school is a registered charity and a limited company, overseen by a board of governors. The current chair of governors took up his appointment in June 2023.
57. There are 19 children in the early years comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
58. The school has identified 25 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Five pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
59. English is an additional language for 13 pupils.
60. The school states its aims are to be a happy and purposeful community where people matter; to promote the central importance of the development of character; to be a place where children can be children, where learning in all its forms is taken seriously, and where every child is known and valued as an individual. It seeks to offer an all-round educational experience where the focus is on developing the whole child, and to help pupils acquire the right habits for life in a supportive, purposeful, stimulating and “gently-Christian” environment.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

24 to 26 September 2024

61. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

62. 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 head, 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.

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

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

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

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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For more information, please visit isi.net