ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

10 to 12 March 2026

Pilgrims Pre-Preparatory School

Brickhill Drive

Bedford

MK41 7QZ

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 fulfil their roles well. They have fostered a shared vision amongst staff that prioritises pupils' wellbeing. Collectively, leaders and staff maintain a positive environment that is tailored well to the ages and abilities of pupils, including the youngest children in the early years.

2. Leaders have a thorough knowledge of their roles and responsibilities and statutory requirements. They ensure that all Standards are met consistently and that policies and procedures are implemented effectively. They use a range of information to assess how well they are ensuring high-quality provision for pupils. They act on any findings in a timely manner. This has had a particularly positive impact on their development of the curriculum. Leaders have identified that the current system of recording, monitoring and tracking pastoral concerns does not give them efficient and precise ways to review where they could be even more effective in their work.

3. The thoroughly researched curriculum enthuses and engages pupils of all ages. Starting with the youngest children in the early years, leaders think carefully about what children need to learn. Teachers are highly competent and knowledgeable and deliver the curriculum adeptly. The precisely planned curriculum and meticulous delivery of lessons help pupils to apply their learning with increasing complexity and maturity. They thrive in the school's high-quality learning environment and are well prepared to transition to Year 3. The quality and impact of the curriculum is a significant strength of the school.

4. Leaders support pupils' mental health and emotional and physical wellbeing. The introduction of learning superhero characters has helped pupils to develop the habits of resilience, reciprocity, resourcefulness and reflection to support their learning now and into the future. The youngest children frequently refer to these characters, such as 'perseverance penguin'. Leaders have implemented an approach to behaviour management that seeks to understand underlying needs rather than focusing solely on sanctions. Pupils behave well, use good manners and are polite towards adults and one another.

5. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to undertake roles of responsibility. Pupil leaders undertake their roles seriously and play an active role in supporting others in the school community. Opportunities for social responsibility, community engagement and charitable activity are integrated across school life.

6. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are knowledgeable and keep up to date with current guidance. They provide regular training for staff so that they understand their responsibilities. Pupils, including the youngest children, are taught how to keep safe and to understand what a trusted adult is. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding work with families closely. Leaders monitor concerns and engage with external agencies in a timely and effective way.

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 step

Leaders should:

- develop systems for recording, monitoring and tracking pastoral activity so that leaders gain a more sophisticated and efficient understanding about their effectiveness in supporting pupils.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Leaders have fully embedded the school's aims and values. Leaders place the aims and values at the heart of decision-making when planning for the future development of the school. They routinely review and bring improvements to the provision for pupils. When new initiatives are implemented, leaders carefully consider whether they are having a positive impact on pupils' experiences and progress. For example, leaders have initiated and embedded a new approach to oracy and literacy, which has greatly improved pupils' ability to articulate stories and their learning.

8. Governors provide robust strategic oversight of leaders' work. They satisfy themselves that leaders have the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake their roles. Governors complete suitable training, such as for safeguarding. They visit the school regularly to monitor procedures. Well-structured committees oversee specific areas of school life with precision. New governors are carefully chosen so that they continue to widen the expertise of the governing body.

9. Leaders maintain up-to-date policies. They check that these are understood and followed by staff. Leaders provide parents with the required policies and information on the school's website. Parents receive comprehensive reports, including consultation notes following parents' evenings. These provide an overview of their child's progress and explain priorities for future learning.

10. The school complaints policy includes the required detail and clearly sets out three stages of escalation. Leaders work with parents to resolve any concerns, in line with the published procedure. Leaders maintain detailed records. Formal complaints are rare and are handled suitably when they do occur.

11. Leaders sustain well-established links with external agencies. For example, they engage with children's services, speech therapists and healthcare professionals to support pupils' specific needs. Leaders understand and follow the local authority's procedures for reporting pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition times.

12. Leaders prioritise the wellbeing of pupils. They make appropriate use of a management system to record pastoral concerns and to support pupils effectively on a daily basis. Leaders analyse a wide range of information thoroughly to help identify any pupils who need extra help. However, they have identified that this system does not provide them with a sufficiently sophisticated or efficient understanding of where they could be even more effective in supporting pupils over time.

13. Leaders in the early years are knowledgeable about their statutory obligations. Leaders in the early years maintain effective oversight of the provision. They check that standards remain high and consistent across the classes. Leaders support staff well, such as by leading a thorough professional development process. Regular meetings take place to enable staff to discuss the children in their care. Leaders and staff stay up to date with the most effective ways of supporting the youngest children to be ready to transition to Year 1.

14. Robust systems are in place for assessing risk. Risk assessments are developed collaboratively with input from multiple members of staff, including operational staff. This helps to include different perspectives when identifying and mitigating risks. Risk assessments consider different situations, such as behavioural, environmental and safeguarding risks. Risk assessments are thoroughly reviewed by senior staff to check that appropriate control measures are in place and so that potential hazards and agreed procedures are clearly understood.

15. Leaders implement a suitable accessibility plan that actively supports pupils' individual needs. Staff who lead areas such as accessibility, inclusion and medical facilities co-ordinate the accessibility plan. They consider necessary adjustments for pupils and monitor impact. For example, staff are provided with additional training to help pupils who have specific needs to access the curriculum. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

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

16. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. Leaders have created an innovative and effective curriculum. They have undertaken a range of thorough research to develop an interesting, engaging and well-planned curriculum. The curriculum teaches key skills and knowledge through a well-considered topic-based approach. Across the school, staff plan topics that help to develop pupils' curiosity, in line with the school's values. The curriculum is effective in enabling pupils to easily make connections between subjects. For example, pupils in Year 2 learn about planets in French, which links to their topic on space. Leaders ensure that the curriculum supports pupils to develop independence. They routinely review the curriculum to ensure that it is providing pupils with the highest quality learning opportunities.

18. Teachers are well trained in delivering the precise knowledge and skills of leaders' intended curriculum. They use their knowledge of the learning dispositions to instil resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and reciprocity in pupils. Teachers continually encourage pupils to develop their knowledge and skills further, such when teachers in Year 2 suggest how pupils' video reports of the Great Fire of London can be further enhanced. Staff expertly shape activities to suit pupils' understanding and interests, such as by adjusting questioning to meet individual needs.

19. Pupils of all levels of prior attainment develop their skills and understanding. This starts in the early years, where staff deliver engaging lessons that enthuse children to learn. Staff teach children to be independent and confident learners. They diligently explain new concepts and knowledge to children and check that they have a secure understanding. Staff in the early years skilfully help children to understand how to apply previously learnt skills in new activities. For instance, when writing Mothers' Day messages in cards and by recalling their prior knowledge of number to estimate the length of an object. In Years 1 and 2, lessons include opportunities for pupils to apply their independent problem-solving and thinking skills, such as when pupils in Year 1 make mature and sophisticated observations when weighing a range of objects.

20. Leaders rigorously analyse the effectiveness of the curriculum and this drives ongoing developments to the curriculum, such as the literacy and mathematics curriculum. This has helped to develop pupils' independent application of core foundational skills in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, leaders' decision to adopt a whole-school literacy approach has noticeably improved pupils' reading and writing skills. Throughout the school, staff deliver engaging literacy sessions, such as in Reception, where pupils speak articulately about writing a recipe for a magic potion.

21. Leaders have created an effective assessment framework. They monitor progress over time through a range of assessment information, including regular standardised tests and teacher assessments. Staff use assessment information precisely to identify where there are any gaps in pupils' learning and understanding and support them to catch up. This enables pupils to make rapid progress and to be successful in their learning.

22. Leaders support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. Pupils who have SEND have their needs assessed appropriately and their progress is reviewed regularly. Teachers plan well-matched activities. They ensure that pupils have access to a variety of learning resources, such as visual aids and technology. Staff take prompt action, ensuring that all pupils are supported in a way that is tailored to their individual needs. This fosters an inclusive environment. Teachers embed support within the classroom effectively for pupils who have SEND, helping pupils to thrive in their learning, alongside their peers.

23. The language-rich environment and carefully tailored lessons help pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) to quickly acquire confidence in the English language. Teachers explain learning well, enabling pupils who speak EAL to acquire a secure understanding of English. This means that they typically require no further support. Where some pupils need more help, leaders have appropriate provision to support pupils to develop important linguistic skills.

24. The school provides a programme of recreational and co-curricular activities that broaden pupils' interests. Activities develop pupils' creative, physical, technical and social skills outside the classroom environment. Leaders have designed a cohesive curriculum and co-curricular offering. This enables pupils to make links in their learning. For instance, by choosing to create a digital story in 'cyber squad' that is based on a class topic. Pupils engage keenly in co-curricular activities.

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

25. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

26. Pupils develop an understanding of respectful behaviour through the continual reinforcement of the school's values. Staff have clear expectations that pupils follow well. Leaders have introduced an effective whole-school behaviour strategy. This has been thoughtfully implemented to ensure its success. All staff are trained so that they understand and consistently apply the procedures. Pupils know the behavioural expectations and respond positively to the rewards in place. They behave consistently well in lessons and during their play. Leaders maintain an effective anti-bullying strategy. They adopt a preventative approach, such as through assemblies and curriculum activities.

27. Teachers foster warm and positive relationships with pupils. They create calm and purposeful learning environments in which pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem. Teachers encourage pupils to persevere with challenges and develop resilience. Staff in the early years provide children with opportunities to develop high levels of independence as well as initiative and confidence. Children in Reception undertake tasks by themselves, such as self-registration, collecting snacks from the snack trolley and taking the compost bin to the kitchen at lunchtime. Staff are positive role models and encourage children to pay one another compliments.

28. Leaders implement a well-structured programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). This includes relationships and sex education (RSE). Pupils develop an understanding of relationships and consent at an age-appropriate level. Leaders have introduced an emotional literacy programme that helps pupils express their feelings. They provide tailored support, such as through nurture groups that help pupils to manage their feelings. This includes the youngest children in the early years.

29. Leaders promote pupils' spiritual and moral understanding through a range of experiences. These include assemblies and visits to places of worship used by different religions. Pupils gain an appreciation of non-material aspects of life through activities such as art. For example, pupils study Kandinsky circles to explore different feelings. The house point system and superhero stickers help pupils to learn a moral code. Each class has their own system to work towards the common goal of achieving 'golden time'.

30. Leaders implement a broad and inclusive physical education (PE) programme, including in the early years. This has a positive impact on pupils' physical health. Pupils engage in specialist teaching in sports such as tennis, football, basketball and cricket, as well as a weekly swimming session. Class teachers deliver alternative sports lessons such as yoga, dance and gymnastics, making sport accessible and attractive to all pupils. Weekly outdoor learning lessons further contribute to pupils' physical and mental wellbeing. Early years staff provide daily opportunities for children to develop their fine motor skills. For example, children take part in 'pen discos' that help develop pencil control.

31. Leaders maintain admission and attendance registers in line with current requirements. They analyse pupils' attendance data thoroughly and take appropriate action when pupils' absence gives cause for concern. Leaders work effectively with the local authority, seeking guidance, making referrals and attending termly meetings to support pupils' attendance.

32. Leaders ensure that they fulfil the requirements for health and safety. Leaders implement their policies and procedures robustly. They ensure that staff have a secure understanding of health and safety responsibilities. This is supported through induction, training and regular communication. Pupils are well supervised. Leaders understand and maintain the required staff ratios.

33. Fire safety arrangements are well established. The school undertakes routine testing of alarms and equipment, as well as regular evacuation drills. Staff review drills to improve procedures. Staff and pupils understand evacuation expectations and respond promptly.

34. There are appropriate systems and accommodation for the care of pupils who are injured or ill, and an effective approach to first aid. Many members of staff are well trained in first aid. Accident and incident records are well maintained and reviewed, allowing leaders to monitor patterns and update policies and risk assessments, where necessary.

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

35. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

36. Pupils' social development is shaped through the school's values of curiosity, kindness and respect. Staff support pupils to consider the perspectives of others. They encourage pupils to work collaboratively. For example, in Year 2, pupils record each other reading newspaper reports. Weekly awards for positive conduct encourage pupils to demonstrate respectful and considerate behaviour towards others. Pupils proudly undertake acts of kindness towards one another. They understand the importance of being kind and respectful, and the difference between right and wrong.

37. Pupils develop an awareness of a range of cultures, beliefs and backgrounds. Through carefully selected texts, pupils explore different perspectives. Pupils broaden their awareness of the wider world through taking part in cultural celebrations. They experience music from a range of traditions. Teachers plan opportunities for pupils to reflect on what respect and inclusion mean. For example, pupils know that racism is unacceptable. Pupils in Year 2 engage in discussion about differences and understand the idea that everyone is unique.

38. The school encourages pupils to develop a sense of responsibility. Children in Reception enjoy opportunities to take on responsibilities such as being the 'helping hand'. Pupils in Year 1 act as 'tiny teachers', assisting their class teacher. Older pupils take on leadership roles such as 'playground pals'. They show initiative and support younger children well.

39. Pupils actively participate in a range of activities in their local community, such as music and drama festivals, engaging with pupils from other schools, including schools in the trust. For example, pupils attend 'colour blast fun runs' that are held to celebrate Diwali. Pupils participate in sponsored events and pupil-led fundraising initiatives that support charitable causes. Leaders promote pupils' environmental awareness by facilitating litter picks in a local park and through regular outdoor education in a woodland area.

40. Leaders introduce pupils to British values, such as democracy. Pupils are elected to be school council representatives and eco-warriors through a voting process. Through these groups, pupils contribute ideas for school initiatives and participate in decision-making. Pupils learn about the work of public services and their role in keeping communities safe through visits from community professionals, for example firefighters and healthcare staff. Staff deliver assemblies and classroom discussions that introduce pupils to social and political issues in an age-appropriate way. Teachers enable pupils to explore different viewpoints within a supportive environment.

41. Pupils acquire an awareness of economic life and the practical use of money. Teachers plan practical experiences such as shopping activities and visits to local shops. These start in the early years and enable children to apply their understanding of money in real-world contexts. For example, children in Reception buy items for a party for a story character. Pupils in Year 2 make and sell cakes in the Victorian tearoom for charity, linking to their topic on the Victorians.

42. The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain and for their futures. Pupils are supported to develop independence and curiosity in their learning. For example, in the early years, children are supported to develop technological skills, learning how to use computer-based activities and devices to capture and upload their learning. Pupils in Year 2 apply the skills and knowledge they have

gained in school on their residential trip. Pupils, including the youngest children, are well supported to be ready to transition to their next stages of education.

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

43. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

44. Leaders and governors have fostered a positive safeguarding culture. They implement robust and thorough approaches. They take all reasonable action to keep pupils safe and ensure that statutory requirements are met. Their procedures are outlined in an appropriate safeguarding policy, which is available on the school's website. Leaders' and governors' policies and procedures pay due regard to current statutory guidance and local arrangements.

45. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are experienced, knowledgeable and well trained. They act quickly when concerns arise. They are proactive in supporting families and work with parents at an early stage to help prevent concerns escalating. They make referrals and seek guidance from external agencies when needed, such as the local authority. They ensure that records of concerns and the actions that they take are well maintained.

46. Governors with responsibility for safeguarding undertake a range of activities to check on the effectiveness of leaders' work. They hold regular meetings with leaders with responsibility for safeguarding, visit classrooms, speak to pupils and staff, and review documentation, audits and reports from leaders. They ensure that leaders are maintaining their statutory responsibilities.

47. Staff know their safeguarding responsibilities, including specific approaches and practice in the early years. They receive regular training that helps them to keep up to date with current practice and to be vigilant to potential safeguarding risks. This includes training on the 'Prevent' duty. Staff report concerns to safeguarding leaders in a timely and effective way. This includes low-level concerns about adults who are working with pupils.

48. Pupils, including the youngest children, learn to speak to adults at school when they have concerns. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, in an age-appropriate way. For example, they are taught when and how to use 999 and call the emergency services. They are also taught about how to keep themselves safe when using online devices, such as not sharing personal information online. The school has an appropriate internet filtering and monitoring system in place. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are alerted to any issues and take prompt action if a concern online or on a digital device is flagged.

49. Governors and school leaders maintain effective oversight of safer recruitment procedures. They check on the suitability of adults appointed to work with children and pupils. Staff who undertake pre-employment recruitment checks are knowledgeable and have relevant training and experience. All pre-employment checks are carried out and accurately recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR).

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Pilgrims Pre-Preparatory School
Department for Education number	822/6010
Registered early years number	EY453343
Registered charity number	1066861
Address	Pilgrims Pre-Preparatory School Brickhill Drive Bedford Bedfordshire MK41 7QZ
Phone number	01234 369555
Email address	enquiries@pilgrims-school.org.uk
Website	www.pilgrims-school.info
Proprietor	The Harpur Trust
Chair	Mrs Rhian Castell
Headteacher	Mrs Jo Webster
Age range	3 months to 7 years
Number of pupils	302
Number of children in the early years registered setting	139
Date of previous inspection	21 to 23 March 2023

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Information about the school

51. Pilgrims Pre-Preparatory School is a co-educational day school located in Bedford. It is one of four schools owned by The Harpur Trust. The trust is supported by a governing body called Pilgrims Pre-Preparatory School committee. The school includes two sections: a separately registered early years setting, for children aged from three months to four years old; and a main school, comprising Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.

52. There are 54 children in the early years, comprising three Reception classes for children aged four to five years old. There is also a separate early years setting, which is registered with Ofsted and which provides for children under four years of age. This comprises three sections: 'Little Pilgrims', which has 'Little Toddler' and 'Toddler' rooms for children aged three months to two years old; a Kindergarten for children aged two to three years old; and a pre-school for children aged three to four years old.

53. The school has identified a very small number of pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

54. The school has identified English an additional language for 54 pupils.

55. The school states that its aims are to inspire a love of learning in children by providing the best possible educational start for each and every child. The objective is to let children be children while helping them flourish and achieve their full potential. The school fosters a sense of inclusion and belonging through the values of kindness, curiosity and respect.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	10 to 12 March 2026

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

57. 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.

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

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- 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.
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