

School inspection report

20 to 22 January 2026

Radley College

Radley

Abingdon

Oxfordshire

OX14 2HR

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. Governors maintain knowledgeable oversight of all areas of school life. They work closely with leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's provision. Leaders monitor the school's implementation of policies systematically so that the Standards are consistently met.
2. Leaders actively foster a culture of kindness in the school and consistently promote pupils' wellbeing. Leaders' clear expectations promote high standards of behaviour in lessons and around the school. Positive relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff, in lessons and in boarding, reflect the mutual respect which is a key component of the school's ethos.
3. The broad and thoughtfully designed curriculum promotes intellectual curiosity and enables pupils to develop knowledge, skills and understanding across a wide range of subjects. An enriching programme of co-curricular activities provides opportunities for pupils to further develop their skills and interests. Well-planned and effective teaching supports pupils to make good progress and attain GCSE and A-level results consistently above the national average. However, in a small number of lessons, teaching is less effective and does not meet the needs of all pupils.
4. Leaders establish highly effective relationships with the local and wider community. Through the school's 'partnership programme', pupils work in close and meaningful partnership with a wide range of schools, community groups and other organisations. Leaders regularly measure the effectiveness of the programme and actively seek pupil feedback which they consider in future planning. Through these experiences, pupils develop a broader life experience and grow in leadership skills, confidence, responsibility and social awareness. This provision is a significant strength of the school.
5. Staff provide effective support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers ensure that lessons meet their needs and enable pupils to make good progress.
6. Teachers help pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) to extend their understanding and fluency so that they can access the curriculum confidently.
7. Leaders prioritise fostering boarders' sense of belonging to their house and the wider school community. Boarders benefit from comfortable, secure and well-maintained accommodation, access to appropriate medical provision and good-quality, nutritious meals. Leaders organise boarding time thoughtfully to enable boarders to study, take part in house activities or enjoy free time.
8. The school teaches pupils to recognise the importance of respecting all people, regardless of their individual identity and pupils demonstrate respect for others in their daily lives. Through the curriculum, regular chapel services and speaker programme, pupils learn about inclusion, cultural diversity and different faiths. As a result, they engage well with wider social, political and cultural issues. Pupils learn and understand that discrimination is unacceptable in any form.
9. Governors and leaders maintain vigilant oversight of safeguarding procedures. Leaders ensure staff are suitably trained and consistently promote a positive culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders forge effective links with external agencies as sources of advice, guidance and support.

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 teaching consistently meets the needs of all pupils.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders establish a positive culture which has at its heart the values of humility, kindness, responsibility and duty. This ensures warm, positive relationships between teachers and pupils. Leaders consistently model the school's core values and, in turn, the pupils reflect them in their daily conduct, upholding high standards of behaviour and mutual respect.
11. An active governing body, which knows the school well, provides leaders with effective support and challenge. Governors receive reports from leaders which they scrutinise meticulously. Governors make regular visits to the school, observe lessons, meet with staff and then report back to the main board. Through this oversight process, they assure themselves that school leaders have the required skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities so that the school consistently meets the Standards.
12. Effective self-evaluation is integral to leaders' approach to strategic planning. It informs the school's five-year strategic plan, the priorities of which are closely aligned to the school's aims. Leaders devise, implement and review action plans to support the further development of the school and provision for pupils. As part of this process, leaders take pupils' views into account and act on their suggestions where appropriate such as during the refurbishment of some of the boarding houses.
13. Leaders ensure the effective implementation of a suitable risk assessment policy. Appropriately trained staff mitigate risk through the provision of detailed risk assessments for the school site and pupils' educational experiences, including for overseas trips. Leaders review risk assessments regularly and amend them, as required.
14. Suitably trained boarding staff manage the boarding houses effectively and successfully foster a deep sense of belonging and community spirit in their houses. Boarders benefit from a thorough induction process and consistent support from boarding staff.
15. Through the school's website, leaders provide parents and prospective parents with appropriate information about school activities and policies. Leaders ensure that parents regularly receive information about their child's attainment, progress and effort. Leaders provide suitable opportunities for parents to discuss their child's progress with staff.
16. Leaders respond promptly and appropriately to any parental complaints. They maintain detailed records, including of actions that they have taken and how complaints have been resolved. Leaders systematically review the causes of complaints to identify issues or trends and see complaints as an opportunity to improve practice.
17. Leaders engage proactively with external agencies, such as the local authority, so that they keep up to date with educational developments and promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. Leaders report to the local authority any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.
18. Leaders and governors maintain and review a suitably detailed accessibility plan and ensure that the school complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

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

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Pupils experience a curriculum which is both comprehensive and balanced, catering to their different ages and abilities. Leaders carefully plan the curriculum so that pupils develop the essential knowledge and skills they need, as well as an enthusiasm for learning. The curriculum develops pupils' knowledge over time across a wide range of subjects including English, science, technology, mathematics, modern and classical languages, humanities and the arts. Critical thinking is a timetabled subject in Year 9 with a deliberate focus on the development of learning skills. The curriculum offers pupils a broad choice of GCSE options and the sixth-form curriculum is equally academically ambitious, offering A levels as well as a range of academic enrichment opportunities, such as the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), which further develop pupils' research and evaluative skills.
21. There is a sustained focus throughout the curriculum on linguistic and numeracy skills. Pupils analyse language and intention when studying *The Holy Sonnets* by the English poet, John Donne, and apply literary devices in their own writing through the study of *Kes*. Pupils further develop their speaking and listening skills by participating in regular debates and through the opportunities provided by a comprehensive visiting speaker programme. Consequently, pupils express opinions articulately and listen attentively to others. Teachers provide pupils with regular opportunities to become fluent in calculations and apply their knowledge in solving complex mathematical problems, such as calculating compound interest in real-life scenarios, and analysing exponential relationships.
22. Teachers across all subjects demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge and make effective use of well-chosen resources. Teachers create purposeful lessons that combine clear explanations, targeted questioning and tasks that enable pupils to think for themselves. Teaching methods and curriculum planning ensure that different groups of pupils make good progress. However, in a small number of lessons, the pace of learning is not consistently well matched to pupils' needs, and opportunities to check pupils' understanding are not always used effectively. As a result, in these lessons, pupils' needs are not always met.
23. Leaders implement a suitable assessment framework that informs teachers about pupils' progress. They analyse and monitor data to improve provision for cohorts, groups of pupils and individual pupils. Pupils receive regular, detailed and clear feedback on their work to enable further progress. Where required, teachers provide support for pupils through lunchtime clinics. As a result of the positive academic culture and robust support systems in place, pupils attain results in public examinations which are above the national average.
24. Leaders actively promote the development of pupils' creativity. Knowledgeable teaching in these areas targets pupils' interests and develops their skills successfully. As a result, pupils create thoughtful artwork and design pieces which are displayed throughout the school. Pupils learn about the key features of dramatic performance, acquire technical theatre skills and develop their musical abilities successfully across a diverse range of genres.
25. The early identification of pupils who have SEND enables leaders to ensure these pupils benefit from appropriate support, including access to study skills sessions and individual support by suitably trained staff. Staff analyse assessment data carefully so as to monitor the impact of provision for these pupils and make any required changes. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress, in line with their peers.

26. Pupils who speak EAL benefit from specific support provided within lessons, the provision of glossaries with key terms and phrases for specific subjects and, where appropriate, through individual tuition. As a result, pupils make good progress across the curriculum.
27. Boarders can access the library and art and design facility during their study periods and they receive helpful guidance from staff when completing work in the evening. As a result, boarders' learning is well supported and enhanced.
28. A rich and interesting co-curricular programme enables pupils to develop their interests and widen their learning experience. Pupils pursue a range of creative, cultural, intellectual and physical activities which include participation in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE). Leaders monitor pupils' participation and encourage them to found and lead new activities and societies. As a result, pupils develop a wide range of skills, as well as an understanding of teamwork and leadership.

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

29. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

30. Leaders place the wellbeing of pupils at the centre of their provision and seek to develop their self-confidence and resilience. Staff teach pupils to show tolerance and respect for all. Effective management of the boarding houses supports the pupils' pastoral welfare. A well-resourced medical centre provides pupils with a range of support services such as counselling and mental health specialists.
31. Leaders implement a well-structured programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), including relationships and sex education (RSE), successfully. Pupils learn about consent and explore appropriate topics such as body image and positive masculinity through meaningful discussion. Leaders ensure key topics are embedded successfully into other subjects such as the study of race relations in music and ethical dilemmas in biology. Staff assess pupils' understanding, provide them with feedback and review the curriculum regularly so as to maintain its effectiveness and relevance.
32. Staff promote pupils' physical health through a programme of physical education (PE) and extensive co-curricular sporting activities. Pupils are given opportunities to take part in team sports such as rugby, rowing and hockey, in addition to more individual pursuits such as golf, fishing and fitness. Staff support the development of pupils' skills and teach them the importance of regular exercise and healthy eating for positive personal wellbeing.
33. Regular chapel services, Bible study sessions, theology lessons where pupils learn about different faiths and 'social prayers', the weekly boarding house assemblies, allow pupils to reflect on spiritual and moral issues. Faith leaders also visit the school, including representatives from Jewish and Catholic backgrounds, giving pupils the opportunity to explore different beliefs and ask thoughtful questions. The provision facilitates a culture of respect, curiosity and open dialogue.
34. Staff apply the code of conduct consistently and fairly. If a pupil's conduct falls below the school's high expectations, leaders support the pupil to reflect on his behaviour and provide guidance as to how it could be beneficially modified. Leaders record incidents carefully so they can identify trends and manage pupils' behaviour effectively. As a result, pupils take responsibility for their behaviour and display respect and courtesy in their daily lives. Bullying incidents are rare and leaders respond quickly and effectively should any incidents occur.
35. Boarding staff know the pupils well and act effectively as a team to support them. Staff implement a clear induction procedure, organise peer mentoring and run regular activities such as 'daily cocoa', a social gathering before bedtime, to foster a sense of belonging. Leaders successfully maintain a genuine culture of mutual respect within the boarding community. Suitable deployment of staff ensures that boarders can always contact a member of staff, including at night. Leaders provide suitably well-maintained accommodation for the boarders. Effective supervision in boarding and throughout the school day further enhances pupils' self-confidence and their sense of security.
36. Suitably trained staff implement health and safety measures appropriately. Regular fire evacuation drills, including in boarding houses, ensure that pupils know how to respond to an emergency. Leaders implement regular checks and maintenance, including of fire safety equipment and gas, electrical and water systems.

37. Pupils benefit from the provision of suitable accommodation to support their medical needs. Suitably trained and experienced staff provide appropriate first aid and medical care, including overnight, to any pupils injured or unwell. Staff ensure any medicines are stored safely and maintain accurate records of the administration of first aid and medication.
38. Leaders implement the admission and attendance policy effectively, in line with statutory requirements. Leaders review pupils' attendance regularly and take appropriate action when concerns arise.

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

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

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

40. Leaders consistently promote a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect. Through the curriculum and wider school experiences, leaders develop pupils' understanding of different cultures and faiths, and issues relating to equality and identity. For example, pupils consider the human cost of Stalin's economic policy in history and how identity is portrayed through Napoleonic paintings in art. Staff encourage pupils to see things from different points of view and listen carefully to other opinions and ideas. As a result, pupils become respectful and tolerant young people, accepting of other cultures and beliefs.
41. Staff prepare pupils successfully for life in modern British society. Through subjects such as history, politics, theology and the various societies such as debating, pupils explore democracy, tolerance and individual liberty. They engage in debates on issues of the day, including the impact of British foreign policy overseas, and continue these discussions in boarding houses with their tutors. Pupils put themselves forward for election to various committees in the school and learn about the rule of law through mock trials. As a result, pupils learn to distinguish right and wrong and explore issues of morality that are central to many current issues.
42. Pupils keenly take on positions of responsibility which enable them to contribute positively to the school community, such as being a prefect or member of the deputy headteacher's advisory committee. They carry out suitable duties with supervision and effective support from staff. Prefects gather pupils' views and opinions and share these with leaders to help improve pupils' experience through the implementation of changes such as a revised lunch menu. Senior pupils act as positive role models and buddies to younger pupils.
43. Leaders maintain a partnerships programme which enables pupils to engage positively with the local community. Pupils participate in a diverse range of activities such as teaching phonics and numeracy to children in local schools, performing music in care homes and teaching animal husbandry skills in the school's countryside centre. Pupils' understanding of the positive contribution they can make to society is evident in their charity fundraising with both whole school and individual boarding house initiatives. As a result of these experiences, pupils grow in life experience, leadership, confidence and moral responsibility.
44. The school ensures that pupils develop a secure understanding of personal finance so that they are well prepared to manage future financial responsibilities. Through the curriculum, talks and competitions, pupils explore themes such as investments, budgeting, loans, identity theft and the role of money in everyday life. This helps them develop a real-world understanding of managing finances.
45. Through the school's 'Futures' programme, pupils receive comprehensive careers guidance. Pupils benefit from access to an online careers platform, a careers week and advice on making applications, as well as interview preparation. Talks from visiting speakers and work experience placements enable pupils to gain further insight into different careers. The careful approach to careers guidance means that pupils are thoroughly prepared to make informed choices about their future.

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

46. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

47. Leaders maintain a robust safeguarding culture. They ensure that the safeguarding policy, which is available to parents on the school's website, reflects the latest statutory requirements and is implemented effectively.
48. Governors place safeguarding at the heart of their decision-making. They scrutinise safeguarding arrangements at the school through regular visits and analysis of reports at governors' meetings and discussions with the safeguarding team. Governors maintain effective oversight, checking that leaders prioritise the wellbeing of pupils.
49. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Appropriate and comprehensive safeguarding training, including at induction, ensures that staff are knowledgeable about potential safeguarding issues and how to respond to these. All staff and governors receive suitable ongoing training throughout the year, with regular updates. As a result, staff maintain vigilance regarding pupils' wellbeing and record all concerns in a timely and secure way. Staff understand the procedures for reporting any concerns they have about adults who work with the pupils, and do so diligently and promptly.
50. The safeguarding team works closely with external agencies, including the local authority and children's services, refers concerns when appropriate and seeks advice when needed. The team holds regular meetings to review concerns, monitor trends and implement support if required. Its members take effective action to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and protected from harm.
51. Pupils are confident to speak to adults in school if they have any worries or concerns. They know that adults will listen and take appropriate action. Pupils know how to express their concerns by speaking to trusted adults, including an independent person, or using the dedicated online system to report any worries.
52. Staff teach pupils how to stay safe online and leaders implement suitable systems to filter and monitor the school's internet. Systems are regularly tested and leaders respond promptly to any notifications of potentially inappropriate use.
53. Leaders conduct thorough safer recruitment practices on all adults before they work with pupils. Leaders ensure the necessary pre-appointment checks are undertaken and appropriately recorded on the school's single central record. Leaders and governors check the record regularly to ensure it is accurately maintained.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Radley College
Department for Education number	931/6079
Registered charity number	309243
Address	Radley College Radley Abingdon Oxfordshire OX14 2HR
Phone number	01235 543000
Email address	warden@radley.org.uk
Website	www.radley.org.uk
Proprietor	St Peter's College Radley
Chair	Mr David Smellie
Headteacher	Mr John Moule
Age range	13 to 18
Number of pupils	769
Number of boarding pupils	769
Date of previous inspection	25 to 26 January 2023

Information about the school

55. Radley College, founded in 1847, is a boarding school for male pupils. It is located in the village of Radley, near Abingdon, in Oxfordshire. The school is overseen by a board of governors, known as the Council.
56. Pupils are accommodated in one of eleven boarding houses. All are located within the school grounds. All boarders are full boarding.
57. The school has identified 230 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care plan.
58. The school has identified English as an additional language for 146 pupils.
59. The school states its aims are to inspire its pupils to become outstanding young men. It sets out to encourage pupils to become self-aware, confident, caring and independent such that, when they leave, they will be ready for the world beyond school; able to engage, lead and shape their own futures successfully.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

20 to 22 January 2026

60. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

61. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and chapel
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and one other governor
- 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
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

62. 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

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

For more information, please visit isi.net