

School inspection report

Date: 30 January to 1 February 2024

Sherborne School for Girls

Bradford Road

Sherborne

Dorset

DT9 3QN

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, governors and managers create a vibrant, inclusive and nurturing environment in which pupils grow in confidence and develop their skills for the next stage of their lives. Leaders provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop a love of learning. School values, such as integrity and respect support pupils' ideals and ambitions. As a result, pupils thrive both academically and emotionally.
2. The boarding provision cultivates a culture of aspiration and fosters collaboration with the wider community. Leaders provide an effective house system within boarding that embraces both day and residential pupils. This creates a warm and cohesive community in which pupils flourish.
3. Teaching staff skilfully deliver the curriculum and provide effective support for pupils of all abilities, enabling them to make good progress from their starting points and to attain well, including in national assessments. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their analytical and evaluative skills are not consistently embedded across the curriculum. A suitable framework for assessment is in place and leaders systematically monitor and analyse pupil progress.
4. Leaders, managers and governors implement appropriate and detailed policies effectively. Leaders actively promote the wellbeing of every pupil and support pupils to be well behaved, principled, considerate and kind.
5. Governors provide support and challenge to leaders and effectively oversee school systems, for example, health and safety monitoring and the single central record of appointments, are secure. Governors meet frequently with pupils as part of their monitoring of the quality of school provision.
6. Premises are well maintained. Leaders maintain a rigorous programme for school development, and pupils value and appreciate their school setting. The wide range of sporting facilities available, provides pupils with opportunities to immerse themselves in their clubs and teams. As a result, pupils develop a love of recreation and sporting activity, promoting physical wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle.
7. The well-resourced health centre provides appropriate medical assistance and effective support for pupils' emotional wellbeing. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum is relevant and adaptive to meet the needs of pupils. As a result, pupils develop their self-esteem and are well prepared for life in modern British society.
8. Leaders take a diligent approach to safeguarding. Staff are well trained and systems to monitor pupils are well maintained and effective. Risks are well understood by leaders and staff, and suitable mitigating actions are put in place and regularly reviewed.

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:

- Extend the opportunities provided for pupils to think critically and work independently in lessons to develop their analytical and evaluative skills.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders, managers and governors keep the school values at the heart of all decision making and maintain a fundamental commitment to social and environmental responsibility. Governors ensure that leaders have appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding, enabling them to carry out their responsibilities effectively.
10. Leaders prioritise the wellbeing of pupils and structure the school timetable to take into account pupils' aptitudes and interests. This creates a busy yet nurturing environment where pupils of all abilities flourish and make good progress. Pupils are proud of their achievements and are confident to tackle any challenges they may face.
11. The school's accessibility plan is suitable, up to date and has been constructed thoughtfully. The school is an inclusive place where everyone is welcome. As a result, pupils respect each other and live and work harmoniously together.
12. Leaders, managers and governors understand and implement systems to identify, manage and mitigate risks effectively. Well-audited record logs and risk assessments reflect the diligence shown by staff who put the safety of the pupils above all else. Leaders mitigate against risk by carefully planning school and weekend activities, along with trips, with secure and thorough risk assessments. Staff are well trained and updated on latest practice, reflecting the school's culture of ongoing professional development.
13. Boarding is well led and highly valued by pupils. Pupils enjoy their boarding experience and all the activities that are on offer outside of the core curriculum. House staff are well trained and play a key role not only in the care of boarders, but also in supporting them on their academic journey. As a result, pupils feel comfortable and confident in raising any concerns they may have.
14. Governors oversee the running of the school effectively, challenging and supporting the leadership team as appropriate. Governors know the school well and visit frequently. Governors take on specific roles, such as responsibility for safeguarding, which helps them to gain specific expertise in key aspects of the school.
15. Leaders evaluate the quality of provision rigorously to identify areas for development as the school constantly seeks to evolve and improve.
16. Leaders have a secure process to receive and manage complaints. The policy is available on the school website, is appropriate, and implemented effectively. Leaders intervene swiftly and sensitively to any concerns raised in line with school policy.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders provide a broad and inclusive curriculum for all pupils. Alongside the GCSE and A level programmes, pupils can access enrichment courses in a variety of subjects, such as modern foreign languages, enabling them to develop a deeper understanding of the course content and culture.
19. All lessons offer opportunities to improve pupils' oracy, writing and reading skills. Information and communication technology (ICT) is embedded throughout the curriculum. For example, in history lessons, older pupils evaluate and assimilate data from different sources to synthesize information about society, economy and foreign policy during the Crimean and Russo-Turkish war. There are extensive opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in the arts, including drama, textiles, ceramics and design. Pupils discuss complex topics in a mature and insightful manner. For example, pupils in the sixth form studying business evaluate real-life examples of business failure and sensitively discuss possible reasons for the failure of the business.
20. Leaders have a thorough understanding of pupils' individual needs. Teachers employ a variety of suitable teaching methods and utilise additional support to meet pupils' needs. Leaders have high expectations for pupils, and staff regularly build in opportunities in lessons for stretch and challenge for all pupils across the ability range. Pupils are highly motivated, make good progress and attain well. Progress and outcomes at GCSE and A level are above national averages.
21. Leaders provide bespoke academic and pastoral support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff understand pupils' needs and respond appropriately by making suitable adaptations in their teaching and in the boarding houses. This supports pupils who have SEND to make consistently good progress.
22. Teachers build respectful relationships with their classes and use their good subject knowledge to develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in their subject. As a result, pupils become more self-aware about their learning and some pupils develop their skills in the critical analysis of academic concepts. However, strategies to support pupils to think critically and to work independently are not embedded consistently across the curriculum.
23. The framework for assessment is rigorous. It enables staff to analyse pupils' learning and make appropriate changes to meet pupils' individual needs. Accurate and consistent feedback allows pupils to reflect on their work and to explore ways to improve their skills. Leaders monitor pupils' progress using a robust tracking system which enables them to take prompt and appropriate action to support pupils if their progress slows.
24. Leaders provide suitable working spaces for boarders in their houses and encourage pupils to work independently in the evenings. Suitable support and guidance are readily available, and pupils balance free time and homework confidently. Pupils collaborate effectively in their boarding houses and build trusting and supportive relationships. This helps pupils to make good progress in their studies.
25. The extra-curricular programme is embedded in the house boarding structure. Participation levels are high and pupils value the range and diversity of the activities and clubs on offer. For example, pupils perform in small exhibitions and in national events including music performances at Sherborne Abbey. Pupils find the extra-curricular opportunities interesting, engaging and enriching.

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

26. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

27. Leaders prioritise and frequently discuss issues concerning pupils' physical and mental health and their emotional wellbeing, for example, in the governors' pastoral committee meetings, with boarding leaders or at the student wellbeing committee. Leaders actively seek pupils' views and pupils feel listened to and valued.
28. Leaders conduct an annual review of the PSHE and the relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum to ensure that the curricula are relevant and meet the needs of pupils. Pupils understand about building positive relationships, how to stay safe including online, and learn about British values.
29. Pupils learn about and appreciate the ways that people can be different such as race, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation through the curriculum, as well as in assemblies and from visiting speakers. This supports pupils to be respectful of each other, to be self-aware and reflect maturely on their actions. There is a culture of inclusivity amongst the community, and the pupils' diversity, equality, and inclusion group works effectively in collaboration with the staff to discuss and consider contemporary topics.
30. Leaders set high expectations of good behaviour and pupils build strong bonds with their peers and form respectful relationships with staff. Leaders maintain appropriate logs of the rare cases of behaviour and bullying incidents, and implement the school policy effectively in response.
31. Leaders develop the physical health of each pupil through a comprehensive programme of sport and health education. A wide range of sports fixtures are a regular feature of the school day which helps pupils to develop strong interpersonal skills and teamwork.
32. The premises are well maintained, and leaders maintain a rigorous culture of health and safety monitoring. Fire safety procedures and building maintenance logs are thorough and are systematically analysed by leaders and governors. First aid provision is extensive and carried out by fully trained professionals in the well-resourced health centre. Pupils can access therapeutic interventions, for example, yoga and reflexology, and they value the calm and nurturing environment these activities provide.
33. The effective and innovative boarding house system underpins the school values and culture of collaboration and aspiration. Day pupils are assigned to a specific house and pupils eat all their meals together in their house dining room. This creates an integrated community for all pupils in the school. Supervision of pupils is effective and allows pupils to have personal space and to be well supported. The aims and routines of the boarding houses are communicated effectively and understood by pupils, parents and staff.
34. Leaders are diligent in analysing pupil admission and attendance records and employ rigorous systems to support good attendance. Pupils are added or removed from the admissions register in line with statutory guidance and school policy.

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. The curriculum provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their social and economic understanding. For example, older pupils reflect on how specific beliefs impact global communities and are able to articulate their ideas with reasoning.
37. Pupils learn about financial matters and budgeting decisions through the PSHE programme. This helps pupils to develop strong economic understanding and skills. Pupils learn about democracy, current affairs and global politics throughout the curriculum. Pupils apply their understanding of democracy through taking part in school elections and appreciate the rule of law in resolving disputes.
38. Pupils distinguish right from wrong and understand their moral responsibilities clearly. Pupils strive to be individuals who respect and adhere to the Christian values of the school. Leaders establish a culture where pupils are accepting and respectful towards others and develop a strong understanding of British values.
39. Leaders value the impact of pupil voice on the development of the school. There are a variety of platforms which allow pupils to contribute and share ideas with leaders, managers and governors. Pupils feel they are listened to and that their opinions matter.
40. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to socialise and develop their interpersonal skills through a joint forum with a local independent boys' school. Pupils appreciate the many opportunities for them to take on prefect roles and other pupil leadership positions in school. For example, each boarding house has its own prefect who meets weekly with the younger pupils and encourages any concerns to be raised, under the guidance of boarding staff. This supportive interaction is valued by pupils in the lower school.
41. Leaders and managers regularly audit the careers programme in order to evaluate the impact of the provision. The head of department provides assistance and guidance to staff which enables them to provide effective support to pupils who are applying to university. Leaders arrange whole school career days and share information about careers regularly with parents. A range of interesting visiting speakers provide further depth and breadth to pupils' options and career pathways.
42. Leaders encourage pupils to become active and responsible members of their local community beyond the school setting. There are many opportunities for pupils to experience and contribute to the town of Sherborne. For example, pupils dedicate time to a neighbouring residential home, supporting elderly residents and making a meaningful contribution to their lives. As a result, pupils emerge as role models and understand the purpose of serving others, especially through their charity work.

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. Governors provide suitable oversight of all aspects of safeguarding including policies which are tailored to the school's needs and reflect the latest guidance.
45. Safeguarding arrangements in boarding houses provide pupils with a secure and homely environment. Safeguarding leaders carry out their duties diligently and build effective relationships with local safeguarding partners.
46. Leaders complete safer recruitment checks on staff and a nominated member of the governing body regularly checks that the single central record of pre-appointment checks is complete and up to date. The designated safeguarding lead is appropriately supported in their work.
47. Safeguarding leaders deliver effective safeguarding induction to all new staff and provide regular safeguarding training and updates to all staff. Leaders use an effective internet filtering and monitoring system in school which helps to keep pupils safe when working online.
48. Staff understand the risks of extremism and radicalisation. They know how to report any concerns that may arise and do so promptly in line with school policy.
49. Leaders have a clear understanding of child-on-child abuse. They are vigilant and take suitable action to prevent incidents from occurring. Leaders liaise appropriately with the local authority, when required.
50. Safeguarding records are well managed and accurate. This allow leaders to identify any patterns or trends and to take further action, if necessary.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Sherborne School for Girls
Department for Education number	6024
Registered charity number	307427
Address	Sherborne School for Girls Bradford Road Sherborne Dorset ST9 3QN
Phone number	01935 818290
Email address	head@sherborne.com
Website	www.sherborne.com
Proprietor	Board of Governors
Chair	Louise Hall
Headteacher	Dr Ruth Sullivan
Age range	11-19
Number of pupils	475
Number of boarding pupils	435
Date of previous inspection	4 to 5 December 2019

Information about the school

52. Sherborne School for Girls is an independent school for girls in Sherborne, Dorset. Pupils are aged between 11 and 18 years, the majority of whom are boarders. The school was founded in 1899 and moved to its current site in 1903. The school is a registered charity overseen by a council of governors who are trustees of the charity and the school's proprietors. The headteacher has been in post since September 2018. A new chair of governors was appointed in 2023.
53. There are seven boarding houses. Five are mixed-age houses (with pupils from Year 9 to Year 12), one is an upper sixth house (Year 13) and one is a junior house (Year 7 to Year 8).
54. The school has identified 183 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
55. English is an additional language for 23 pupils.
56. The school states that its aim is to be the leading full-boarding girls' school for all-round personal development and academic fulfilment, and to create a community of empowered learners who will be an influence for good in a challenging and changing world. Its five key values are for pupils to be curious, courageous, compassionate, adaptable and spiritual, along with a fundamental commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

30 January to 1 February 2024

57. A team of 9 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

58. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- 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
- 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.

59. 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**.

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