ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

# School inspection report

9 to 11 December 2025

# Cheltenham Ladies' College

Bayshill Road

Cheltenham

GL50 3EP

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. The school's leaders and governors promote and communicate the school's aims effectively. The clear and co-ordinated direction of their broad academic and pastoral provision enables pupils to discover their own pathway and achieve well.

2. The school's leaders implement the curriculum in a flexible manner, which enables individual needs and wishes to be met. The curriculum helps pupils to develop their knowledge and skills substantially, leading to high attainment. The school's leaders, supported by the staff, have developed the use of digital technology inside and outside the classroom.

3. Pupils display levels of maturity and resilience both inside and outside the classroom, supported by the joint and co-ordinated guidance of pastoral and academic staff. Leaders have ensured there is a broad range of co-curricular activities on offer, which is available to all pupils. It is delivered as part of the co-ordinated academic, co-curricular and pastoral care provision of the school, giving pupils many choices in a wide range of activities. Pupils' participation in these contributes considerably to the development of skills, such as collaboration, leadership and oracy, leading to improved success in their levels of achievement. The school carefully monitors pupils' involvement and enables pupils to benefit from a programme that reflects their interests and abilities, ensuring individuals are not overloaded. The programme successfully combines the academic and the co-curricular aspects of learning, supported by the effective promotion of pupils' emotional wellbeing. The manner in which the school co-ordinates the curricular, co-curricular and pastoral care programmes and applies them to promote individual pupils' best interests is a significant strength of the school.

4. Pupils have high aspirations, encouraged by the school's academic and pastoral approach to learning, and they understand the need to keep a sensible perspective on the balance between study and leisure. However, the school does not enable all pupils to develop consistently their strategies to manage pressure and workload well.

5. The school has a clear focus on supporting the emotional wellbeing of boarding and day pupils, both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers encourage pupils to be respectful of each other and this encourages a calm and purposeful atmosphere in the school. The curriculum positively promotes pupils' physical and emotional health.

6. The school ensures that pupils are effectively prepared to play an active role in wider society, including through the consistent promotion of the importance of contributing to the community. Pupils display high levels of social maturity and engagement with activities that enable them to contribute to society.

7. Leaders have put in place robust safeguarding policies and procedures. The safeguarding team responds to any concerns promptly and appropriately. Leaders ensure that all adults working with pupils are subject to all required safer recruitment checks.

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## 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:

- identify ways to ensure all pupils understand how to access and use the range of strategies for managing pressure and workload, so that their wellbeing is promoted consistently.

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# Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders at all levels, from the senior leadership team through to the middle managers, have defined roles and responsibilities. They provide clear and effective direction to staff and constantly review practice in the school. Their attention to detail provides a highly positive learning experience for pupils and promotes their wellbeing effectively.

9. Governors, known as members of the Council, maintain effective oversight, supported by an advisory group of alumnae who bring their own perspective to the management of the school. Individual governors meet with staff and pupils to gain a better perspective. They ensure that leaders display good knowledge and understanding and fulfil all their responsibilities.

10. Leaders promote and communicate the school's aims and clear set of values effectively across the entirety of the school's provision. Staff understand the school's values and model these consistently.

11. Leaders ensure that staff responsible for boarding are suitably trained and are equipped to fulfil their safeguarding and wider pastoral responsibilities. The boarding houses offer a comfortable and supportive environment for the pupils.

12. Leaders ensure that the pupils' nutritional, social, emotional and medical needs are appropriately met, liaising with external agencies as needed.

13. Risk assessments are dynamic and regularly reviewed. For example, leaders are aware of the potential risks presented by being located in the town centre and take appropriate measures to mitigate these. Leaders ensure that all risk assessments are suitable, including through the use of external specialists to assist with their review of risk assessments for educational trips, and provide training for staff and pupils on managing risk. Governors maintain oversight of risk assessment arrangements to ensure their continued effectiveness.

14. The school provides regular reports to parents about the progress of their child and the school's website contains the required information about the school. The school liaises appropriately with the local authority if any pupils leave or join the school at non-standard times of transition.

15. There is a clear complaints policy, which is followed through appropriately. Details of each of the three stages are recorded in writing and any actions taken by the school are identified. Leaders carefully review the school's implementation of the complaints procedure and responses to complaints to check their suitability.

16. The school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. A suitable accessibility plan is in place, which details appropriate actions to enable all pupils to access the curriculum and the school's premises and facilities.

## 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 have created a broad and rich curriculum, which dovetails with the extensive co-curricular programme. This effective co-ordination helps pupils to see how these two curricular areas work together to extend their range of skills and further their progress and achievement. Departments produce detailed schemes of work. Teachers provide challenging extension work, to enable pupils to develop well towards their potential. These programmes of work also indicate how each department contributes to pupils' wider academic development and provides opportunities for cross-curricular working. Pupils can choose a range of subjects that suit their skills and interests well. There is a particular focus on providing a flexible curriculum that is tailored to individual pupils, where possible, and facilitates pupils' selection of subjects suitable for their individual needs. This could take the form of, for example, mixing different examination courses or reducing the number of subjects because a pupil is involved in a specialist activity that is very demanding of time. The flexibility of offering is enhanced by sixth formers benefiting from the dual programme provision of the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma alongside A levels and the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).

19. Senior and middle leaders ensure that schemes of work are designed to develop pupils' subject knowledge and skills methodically and in depth, thus helping to encourage a breadth of application. Library facilities and regular reading challenges across a range of subjects are well planned to encourage pupils to develop their critical and analytical thinking about literary, linguistic, scientific, mathematical and other subject matter. Leaders provide academic support for boarders outside of lessons. House staff support boarders when working in the evenings and it is common for younger boarders to seek help from older ones. Teachers enable pupils to seek academic advice from them when required, including through digital means.

20. The school provides a wide-ranging co-curricular programme available at different times of the day and week. Teachers monitor pupils' engagement in this programme to reduce any potential for overloading and to enable very high rates of participation in this programme. The co-curricular programme is co-ordinated and overseen by the co-curricular team, working closely with the heads of different disciplines, to ensure pupils can have access to all areas equally. The programme enables pupils to further develop an extensive range of skills such as resilience, perseverance and teamwork. They also develop greater knowledge and understanding in their learning, in areas such as creativity, design and oracy. For example, leaders responded to the findings of pupil surveys and teachers' assessments, which suggested a need to focus on the development of pupils' oracy skills, with identifiable success.

21. Teachers use their subject knowledge to deepen pupils' learning and inform a stimulating, learning environment. Expert questioning from teachers promotes active engagement in lessons and the opportunity for pupils to develop ideas and confidently display their oracy skills. By the sixth form, pupils apply the definitions and factual knowledge they have learned to form independent opinions and develop detailed arguments. They analyse effectively and apply prior knowledge, demonstrating detailed reasoning. Pupils are confident working independently and collaboratively. Teaching enables pupils to make good progress and achieve results in public examinations above national averages. Pupils then typically move on to higher education institutions both in the UK and abroad, or choose high level apprenticeships.

22. A thorough assessment and evaluation framework is in place. Academic leaders work with departmental leaders to produce action plans that reflect the information gathered from assessment data. This is then enhanced by the continual process of monitoring pupils' progress in lessons against this data. This enables teachers to set clear targets for achievement and to support individual pupils effectively when such a need becomes apparent.

23. The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is informed by the input of both pastoral and academic leaders, making effective use of prior information from previous schools and baseline tests on joining the school. The particular needs of pupils are identified by the members of the experienced learning support team, who provide guidance on how to support these needs in the classroom. Pupils who have SEND make good progress, supported by a robust tracking system, and achieve well.

24. The school in its documentation, uses the term multi lingual for its international pupils, rather than pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), reflecting their proficiency in a range of languages, including English. Pupils who might need help, receive effective support from the school., throughtimetabled language lessons to develop their English skills and comprehension. The school records 23 pupils as needing this.

25. Leaders ensure that pupils are conversant with the use of digital technology as part of their everyday learning. Teachers help pupils to use devices for research, producing work, making notes and receiving feedback. This approach provides pupils with the ability to keep all their work in one place and to add to it constantly. Pupils display a high level of skill in manipulating their work on devices in lessons. For example, in a sixth-form economics lesson, pupils use devices to draw graphs, which the teacher then displays on the whiteboard for the whole group to discuss and learn from. In addition, pupils learn the advantages and disadvantages of using artificial intelligence and to adopt a reasoned approach to technology. Pupils are able to articulate their thoughts clearly.

## 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 actively promote the emotional wellbeing of pupils through the curriculum and the co-curricular programme. They co-ordinate the academic and pastoral support for pupils to ensure that pupils receive the support that they need to enable them to build resilience and feel confident and respected. Leaders are aware that pupils can feel pressure to achieve well and have put in place support for them in this regard; however, not all pupils are currently able to draw on a sufficient range of strategies as needed.

28. There are detailed schemes of work in place for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE), taught by a specialist team and drawing on expertise within and outside of the school to enhance provision. There are links between this programme and other subjects and the assembly programme to broaden pupils' perspectives on issues such as consent and potentially abusive behaviours. Teaching makes use of surveys at the end of topics to assess the impact of modules. Teachers consult with pupils when planning the programme, seeking to address any specific themes that might be of concern to them. The school emphasises the teaching of British values, such as tolerance and individual liberty, when pupils, including international boarders, first arrive in the school and then through the curriculum and assembly programme.

29. The physical education (PE) programme is designed to reflect the needs of the pupil community. Sport is inclusive and pupils have a wide variety of sports to choose from, including outdoor adventure activities. These build skills of teamwork and co-operation, as well as allowing managed risk-taking. Proficient pupils have opportunities to flourish and to be involved in teams, and other pupils are enabled to find physical activities they enjoy and develop the relevant skills for those sports. Leaders promote physical activity, analyse rates of participation in different sports and take action to find activities to suit all pupils' abilities and preferences. Pupils enjoy participating in sports.

30. The pastoral team ensures that pupils understand the school's behavioural expectations. Pupils exhibit a calmness in their behaviour. They are focused in class and want to learn. Pupils are welcoming and polite. Leaders promote a positive rapport between pupils and staff, who clearly know their pupils well. Pastoral leaders train staff in managing behaviour and identifying possible bullying, outlining potential scenarios that could occur and indicating appropriate actions and the use of the school's online system to record and communicate any worries. Leaders and staff hold weekly meetings to monitor and discuss any pastoral concerns about pupils. Leaders monitor records of behavioural and bullying concerns in order to identify any patterns and respond to these appropriately.

31. Pupils are suitably supervised during the school day and boarding hours. Pupils know how to seek help if needed, with staff positioned in key places at breaktimes. Leaders in the boarding houses are supported by assistants, so that pupils always have people they can go to with any concerns. Boarding staff receive training when they join the school so that they understand, and are equipped to fulfil, their pastoral roles and responsibilities.

32. The school teaches pupils about a wide range of faiths and religions and encourages mutual respect within the day and boarding communities. Provision includes opportunities for boarders to tell each

other about their culture, assemblies recognising religious festivals and time for reflection during morning prayers. Pupils are exposed to a wide range of traditions and cultures and develop an understanding of these and enhance their sense of deeper issues and ideas about the world. This wider awareness is helped by the provision of a room where pupils can reflect quietly and different faith groups can meet. Pupils lead assemblies for the whole school and discuss their beliefs, supported by staff. There is a positive atmosphere between day and boarding pupils, with both groups learning from each other.

33. Premises and accommodation are well maintained. Required health and safety checks and servicing of equipment are carried out and recorded regularly and methodically. Fire safety measures are suitable. Leaders make effective use of advice and reports from external specialists, such as the fire service, to ensure that fire safety arrangements are effective. For example, there are regular fire risk assessments and fire evacuation drills during both day and boarding hours.

34. The school's provision for the pupils includes a medical centre with specialists in many aspects of physical and mental health. Arrangements are in place for pupils to access these services easily when required, so that their medical and pastoral needs are met. Staff in the boarding houses are trained to provide basic medical treatment and liaise closely with the medical centre. This is staffed at all times and pupils with more serious illnesses can be accommodated here.

35. The admission and attendance registers are maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders scrutinise attendance on a weekly basis and follow up any concerns about absenteeism appropriately.

36. Boarders are provided with welcoming and comfortable boarding houses that include suitable facilities, including sleeping accommodation. Staff work diligently to meet the boarders' needs. The boarding houses are warm, well lit and provide a conducive environment for both work and recreation. The induction programme ensures boarders are well prepared for boarding life and understand how to request support, should it be needed.

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

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

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

38. The school develops pupils' sense of responsibility for others through varied leadership roles involving pupils of all ages. These range from 'big sisters' in the boarding houses to peer mentors, form captains and school prefects.

39. The school actively promotes positive attitudes towards diversity and equality. Pupils learn about different forms of prejudice, so the pupils understand the importance of tolerance in a diverse society. In PSHE, pupils learn about equality and human rights legislation and the characteristics of people's identities that are protected by law. They explore how laws have changed over the years, such as how laws relating to marriage have altered over time.

40. The school provides well-resourced and up-to-date careers guidance from staff with particular expertise in different areas. Pupils receive lessons on careers and preparation for the outside world from Year 7. Careers guidance for older pupils includes guidance on choosing subjects for external examinations and specific skills for employment. Staff provide helpful information and advice on apprenticeships and higher education institutions both in this country and abroad. Pupils are supported in preparing applications and looking for work experience.

41. The PSHE and RSE programmes support the personal development of pupils and help to develop those qualities likely to help them as members of society. The curriculum promotes skills of collaboration, the ability to distinguish right from wrong, the development of individual integrity and resilience, all in preparation for adult life. The school establishes clear expectations of what is appropriate behaviour in the context of society's moral code and the programme includes lessons on recognising misinformation and how truth can be manipulated. Pupils develop a thorough understanding of the rule of law and the workings of democracy through PSHE lessons on citizenship and government, as well as events such as 'democracy week'.

42. The curriculum provides pupils in all years with an understanding of money and economic principles, both within the PSHE programme and other subjects, such as mathematics. Pupils learn a range of financial topics, such as the pressures to spend money, how to budget and manage a bank account and the effect of inflation. In the sixth form, there is a comprehensive programme of preparing pupils for leaving school and living independently, including student finance.

43. School leaders encourage pupils to support both the local and wider communities through working with local charities, such as the hospice. Staff provide advice for pupils in volunteering and fundraising for their chosen activities and pupils' participation in volunteering activity is high. There is an extensive and varied community programme through both the boarding houses and the year groups. Pupils also learn about issues such as climate change and sustainable development.

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

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

# Safeguarding

45. Leaders promote a culture whereby all staff understand their responsibility towards safeguarding the pupils. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance.

46. Members of the safeguarding team are appropriately trained for their role. They include representation from pastoral leaders, the leader of provision for pupils who have SEND and the leader responsible for first aid and medical care. The safeguarding team responds promptly and effectively to any concerns that arise, including by liaising with external safeguarding partners and, when applicable, referring concerns on to them.

47. Any concerns and issues are recorded fully in suitable safeguarding records, which include details of the concerns, decisions made, actions taken and any resolutions.

48. Governors maintain effective oversight of safeguarding. They receive regular training and scrutinise formal termly reports from the school. The governor with specific responsibility for safeguarding liaises regularly with the school's safeguarding team.

49. Those responsible for recruitment procedures carry out all required pre-employment checks of adults before they commence working at the school. They maintain a comprehensive single central record of appointments (SCR), which is routinely checked by senior leaders and governors.

50. Staff understand how to report any concerns about pupils' wellbeing, supported by the regular in-person and online training organised by the safeguarding team. Pupils are aware of how they can report issues and to whom they can report them. The school provides pupils with an online system for anonymous reporting, should this be preferred.

51. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including online, through lessons in PSHE and frequent reminders from the safeguarding team. An effective internet filtering and monitoring system is in place. The safeguarding team responds quickly to any potential misuse of the internet.

## The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

| | |
|---|---|
| **School** | Cheltenham Ladies' College |
| **Department for Education number** | 916/6036 |
| **Registered charity number** | 311722 |
| **Address** | Cheltenham Ladies' College<br>Bayshill Road<br>Cheltenham<br>Gloucestershire<br>GL50 3EP |
| **Phone number** | 01242 520691 |
| **Email address** | enquiries@cheltladiescollege.org |
| **Website** | www.cheltladiescollege.org |
| **Proprietor** | Cheltenham Ladies' College Council |
| **Chair of governors** | Mrs Merryl Webster |
| **Executive Principal** | Ms Eve Jardine-Young |
| **Age range** | 11 to18 |
| **Number of pupils** | 816 |
| **Number of boarding pupils** | 626 |
| **Date of previous inspection** | 8 to 10 November 2022 |

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## Information about the school

53. Cheltenham Ladies' College is an independent day and boarding school registered for female pupils, situated in Cheltenham. The school is divided into the Lower College, Upper College and a sixth form. The school is overseen by a board of governors, known as the Council. The current chair of this group took up her position in December 2023.

54. There are 11 boarding houses, six for pupils aged 11 to 16 years and five for pupils in the sixth form. These are situated between two and fifteen minutes from the school. There is capacity for a very small number of flexi-boarders. Guardians, where needed, are arranged by parents. There are three day houses, two for pupils aged 11 to 16 and one for the sixth form.

55. The school has identified 273 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

56. The school has identified 284 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.

57. The school states its aims are to embody excellence, independence, inspiration and empowerment in the education of women. It seeks to support and guide girls in becoming self-determining, fulfilled and resilient women who value, serve and enrich the communities to which they belong in a complex and changing world, and honouring their pioneering heritage through challenge and innovation in the pursuit of academic excellence.

# Inspection details

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|---|---|
| **Inspection dates** | 9 to 11 December 2025 |

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

59. 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 vice-chair and other governors
- discussions with the head of College, 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.

60. 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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