ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

Cheltenham College Preparatory School

Thirlestaine Road

Cheltenham

GL53 7AB

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 and leaders work together effectively. They evaluate the school's performance and assure themselves that the Standards are met consistently, including the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (NMS). Leaders ensure that boarding pupils enjoy a secure, supportive environment. Teachers take appropriate action to mitigate risks. Leaders provide parents with access to key policies on the school's website, including the complaints policy. If parents raise any concerns, leaders respond in a timely and supportive manner to resolve them. Children in the early years experience stimulating activities. These support their personal, social, emotional and physical development appropriately. Early assessment identifies needs for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, staff implement effective strategies, so pupils achieve well from their different starting points.

2. Typically well-planned teaching enables leaders to deliver the carefully structured curriculum successfully. Teachers organise pupils' learning systematically to build logically and effectively on pupils' previous studies. They make thoughtful use of a range of different resources. These stimulate pupils' interest and understanding by introducing relevant cross-curricular links. Teachers use the information gathered through regular assessment of pupils' work to identify where pupils can improve. This leads to well-aligned strategies, which support pupils' progress successfully. Leaders identify pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) promptly. They ensure that teachers provide them with appropriate support. Day pupils and boarders benefit from a range of stimulating co-curricular activities during the normal school week, in the evenings and at weekends.

3. Leaders successfully create an atmosphere that prioritises kindness and enjoyment in learning and at play. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes focus pupils on the importance of building purposeful relationships based on mutual respect. Pupils' typically good behaviour results from teachers' consistent and thoughtful implementation of the school rules. When pupils do make unwise choices, staff support them to understand how they should behave. This helps pupils to improve. Highly effective teaching of physical education (PE) throughout the school supports pupils' physical development and their enjoyment of different sports. Thorough, efficient management of health and safety arrangements enhances pupils' comfort and security in school and in the boarding house.

4. Leaders ensure that pupils develop an understanding of the benefits of maintaining democratic rights and freedoms. Staff provide pupils with practical experience of democracy in action through elections to, and participation in, the work of the school and boarding councils. They teach pupils to respect different cultures and beliefs. Pupils learn to appreciate the distinction between right and wrong. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to support local community life. Pupils take on leadership roles which match their interests and aptitudes. Leaders support the pupils' acquisition of financial and economic understanding and skills. They provide a programme of careers guidance. However, the programme does not provide sufficiently detailed guidance about future pathways for pupils of secondary school age.

5. Leaders' thorough and robust management of safeguarding supports pupils' safety and promotes their wellbeing. However, at the time the inspection began, staff did not ensure that all the required information about pre-employment checks was recorded on the single central record (SCR). This was rectified before the completion of the on-site inspection.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that all information relating to safer recruitment is stored promptly on the single central record of pre-appointment checks on new staff
- develop the careers programme so that it provides pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 with more consistently detailed guidance to support their understanding of future pathways.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

6. Governors visit the school frequently to meet pupils and staff, as well as to attend assemblies, concerts and drama productions. They implement an effective programme of governing body meetings. During meetings, they consider carefully detailed reports provided by leaders on different aspects of school life. In these ways, governors maintain appropriate oversight to assure themselves that Standards, including the NMS for boarding schools are met consistently. Leaders and governors collaborate effectively to plan the development of the school. They ensure that the school's aims and ethos are securely embedded in daily practices and procedures. Leaders articulate a clear commitment to fostering joyful learning and developing confident, resilient learners. Pupils are recognised as individuals with their own attributes.

7. Effective boarding provision is aligned with the school's aims and wider strategic vision. Leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of their responsibilities. They implement policies relating to induction, welfare and supervision consistently, ensuring that they are well understood by pupils. This results in a well-organised boarding environment. Established routines, including effective staff supervision and regular opportunities for boarders to contact their families, support pupils' sense of security.

8. Leaders ensure effective risk management so that boarding and co-curricular provision is well organised. This promotes pupils' wellbeing, safety and engagement appropriately. Suitably trained staff mitigate risks to pupils through the provision of detailed risk assessments. These cover the premises, educational activities on site, educational trips and individual pupils' welfare. Leaders implement a robust review process and amend risk assessments, as appropriate.

9. The school's website and social media posts provide current and prospective parents with required information about the school's policies and activities. Parents receive frequent written reports about their child's progress and attainment. These also provide guidance as to how their child can improve their learning. Staff meet with parents at regular, formal meetings. Senior staff also make themselves available at the start and end of the school day and during sports fixtures for informal discussions with parents.

10. Leaders maintain regular and positive links with external agencies, including the local authority, children's services and educational professionals, such as speech and language and occupational therapists. Leaders report to the local authority those pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition points. Leaders also know that they must provide the local authority with information about any pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including information related to finance and funding.

11. Leaders provide parents with access to an appropriate complaints policy. They maintain detailed records of their prompt and supportive responses to any parental concerns. These records set out the nature of the concerns, leaders' actions and how the matters are resolved.

12. Robust assessment and tracking procedures mean that pupils who have SEND receive appropriate support from well-trained staff. Leaders maintain a suitable accessibility plan. This sets out clear targets, as well as the required actions to enhance pupils' access to the school site and the curriculum. As a result of this approach, the school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

13. In the early years, leaders demonstrate a consistently reflective approach, actively seeking to continue to strengthen practice through regular and independent external audits. Regular staff training, including in safeguarding, paediatric first aid and curriculum development, supports the quality of teaching and care which children receive. Governors' oversight, through their regular visits, contributes positively to the maintenance of the early years requirements. As a result, children make good progress in a well-led setting characterised by high expectations, which are consistently realised.

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

14. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

15. Leaders provide a broad curriculum. This aims to foster pupils' intellectual curiosity, academic rigour and the ability to learn independently. Pupils study the principal subjects, including English, mathematics, science, the humanities and the creative and performing arts. They also experience outdoor education, learn classical and modern foreign languages and, in Year 8, follow a programme comprising modules in life skills such as finance, cookery and leadership. Academic leaders in the senior and prep schools collaborate effectively to draw up schemes of work based on systematic progression of knowledge and skills across year groups. This means that pupils are well prepared for successful transition from the prep school to Year 9.

16. Well-trained staff support children's learning effectively in the early years. Children make good progress in developing their numeracy skills. They can recognise the number of objects, for example, in a small group without needing to count them individually. Phonics teaching supports children to recognise syllables and spell words independently. They move from simple mark-making in Nursery to writing sentences with correct punctuation in Reception.

17. Pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding well as they get older. In mathematics, they complete equations successfully. They understand how to calculate the area and circumference of circles. Pupils learn to plan stories featuring key grammatical structures, such as direct speech, in English. While studying plants in science, pre-prep pupils make cross-curricular links with their reading of *Jack and the Beanstalk* in English. Staff develop pupils' creativity in drama, art and music. Without the use of any words, small groups convincingly act out the developmental stages of a tree from a seed to full growth. Pupils compose their own music on keyboards and create butterflies from dried willow rods.

18. Knowledgeable teachers provide typically well-planned lessons which make effective use of time. They use a range of resources and ask thoughtfully targeted questions which take account of pupils' different learning needs. Through a mixture of paired, group and whole class work they support pupil collaboration effectively. As a result, pupils behave well in class, tackle tasks diligently and sustain their concentration.

19. Leaders implement regular assessment of pupils' attainment and their attitudes to learning. They use the information gathered from standardised tests, termly examinations and teachers' marking of pupils' work. This helps them to determine strategies which support pupils' progress. Teaching of phonics, additional tuition to improve handwriting skills and classroom strategies matched to pupils' needs enhance pupils' learning. Pupils record their academic targets in their weekly planners. They discuss these regularly with their form teachers so that they understand their learning objectives. Leaders' structured approach to assessment underpins pupils' good progress.

20. Rigorous assessment and teachers' classroom observations enable leaders to identify pupils who have SEND early in their time at the school. Specialist teachers of pupils who have SEND liaise with classroom teachers to draw up individual learning plans (ILPs) to support these pupils' progress. Staff liaise closely with parents and review the ILPs regularly with them. Use of word-banks, pre-teaching of key concepts and one-to-one support embed learning successfully. Careful tracking of pupils' work confirms that these strategies are effective. This means that pupils who have SEND make good progress.

21. Staff interview and complete formal assessments of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) when they join the school. This identifies the specific support that individual pupils need. Teachers use effective strategies, such as glossaries of key terms, with translation into the pupil's home language. These pupils also benefit from phonics teaching and individual support by trained staff, as well as from speech and language therapists. As a result, pupils who speak EAL make good progress in building their vocabulary and understanding of grammatical structures.

22. Pupils benefit from a wide range of co-curricular opportunities. They take part in activities such as horse riding, kickboxing, rehearsals for various musical ensembles, art and junk modelling clubs. Boaders can opt for sports, including swimming and table tennis. They play different social games, such as 'capture the flag'. They enjoy weekend trips climbing and going to the cinema. Through these activities, pupils develop their interests and also build on and develop new skills and abilities. The varied opportunities on offer also foster a sense of community and belonging.

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

23. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

24. Leaders promote kindness, courtesy, joyful learning and mutual respect as the values which define the school. They create a happy community in which pupils share willingly and collaborate confidently. Constructive relationships and effective communications between staff and pupils contribute positively to pupils' confidence and resilience. Pupils demonstrate self-esteem. They take pride in their achievements. Staff provide pupils with appropriate levels of challenge and consistent encouragement. School, house and year group assemblies promote pupils' emotional wellbeing. These events recognise and celebrate pupils' personal achievements, including through awards for perseverance and empathy. Staff reinforce these values through PSHE lessons and discussion during form times and in the boarding house. Pupils learn about the harms caused by misogyny, racism and other forms of prejudice. Staff support pupils to avoid these attitudes and provide parent workshops to help parents to manage their child's development successfully.

25. Staff teach a carefully mapped relationships and sex education (RSE) programme in a spiral structure. This ensures that key themes are revisited each year in an age-appropriate way, so that pupils' understanding is deepened. Leaders provide parents with information about the curriculum and invite their feedback. They hold meetings to discuss topics further with them. Pupils learn about key topics including healthy relationships, the adverse effects of pornography and the challenges posed by artificial intelligence and deepfakes. Staff assess pupils' knowledge and understanding with quizzes on each topic and end of year surveys. They use this information to amend the programme as necessary.

26. Staff implement a well-understood code of conduct consistently and fairly. Pastoral leaders meet regularly to analyse information from pupils' behaviour records. They identify trends and provide pupils with the support they need. Staff model the conduct expected of pupils. Typically kind, courteous behaviour is evident throughout the school. Leaders promote anti-bullying strategies through PSHE and assemblies. Specific programmes for male and female pupils help them to manage friendship issues, potentially unkind comments and competitiveness. Pupils and staff take part in Odd Socks Day to celebrate individuality and reject all forms of bullying. As a result, instances of bullying are rare. If bullying does occur, staff respond promptly and thoughtfully. They support both victims and perpetrators. Opportunities for pupils to discuss how best to control their emotions help them to modify their behaviour and avoid conflict in the future.

27. Leaders' effective deployment of staff supports pupils' sense of security and self-confidence. Staff maintain suitable supervision throughout the school day, especially at breaktimes and during co-curricular activities. This contributes positively to the maintenance of good relations between staff and pupils. In the early years, leaders maintain the required adult-to-child ratios. They ensure that children are always within sight or sound of an adult. They implement robust handover processes to parents at the end of the school day. Well-trained early years and prep school staff monitor children during mealtimes. They are alert to the dangers of choking.

28. Through well-planned religious studies lessons, pupils learn about Christianity and the world's major faiths. They develop understanding of the principal beliefs and rituals of these religions. Teachers also support pupils to explore moral issues, such as the ethics of foxhunting. Outdoor learning, mindfulness sessions and work in creative subjects such as art, drama and music enable pupils to appreciate the non-material aspects of human experience.

29. Leaders promote pupils' physical development through a range of well-planned activities. In the early years, children develop balance and co-ordination through dance and outdoor play on bikes and scooters. They learn to negotiate climbing equipment safely. Painting and play with modelling dough successfully promote their fine motor skills. Specialist PE staff teach children and prep school pupils how to swim. They develop older pupils' abilities in athletics and team sports, such as rugby, cricket, hockey and tennis. Pupils learn basic physiological awareness with cross-curricular links made between sport and science. High standard sports coaching promotes pupils' participation, skills development, teamwork and personal confidence.

30. Leaders provide boarders with warm, comfortable and secure accommodation which pupils can personalise to create a homely atmosphere. Pupils engage confidently with boarding staff through formal structures, such as their membership of the boarding leadership team, and more informal opportunities to express their opinions in open house forums, suggesting improvements to house life. Leaders ensure the effective deployment of staff so that pupils are supervised effectively. This includes overnight and at weekends when they can always contact a trusted adult. If they have concerns about their own wellbeing or that of their friends, they can talk privately to boarding staff, to a member of the safeguarding team or contact an independent person who visits the school regularly. Pupils complete their homework in supervised study periods at the end of the school day. This means that they can relax with their friends in the boarding house during the evening. However, there are study spaces in the boarding house for pupils who wish to do academic work. Duty staff help and support them, as required.

31. Leaders ensure the admission and attendance registers are maintained as required by statutory guidance. Staff monitor pupils' attendance carefully. They liaise promptly and supportively with parents if their child's attendance causes concern.

32. Pupils benefit from the provision of suitable accommodation to support their medical needs. Staff qualified in first aid, including paediatric first aid, provide appropriate medical care to any pupils who are injured or unwell. Staff ensure the safe storage of medicines. They maintain accurate records of the administration of first aid and medication.

33. Leaders' effective management of health and safety ensures the premises are suitably maintained. They instigate regular fire evacuation drills, including in the boarding houses. Pupils and staff know how to respond in an emergency. Leaders implement regular checks and maintenance, including of fire safety equipment, electrical and water systems.

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

34. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

35. In PSHE and religious studies lessons, assemblies, weekly chapel services and form time, pupils learn to celebrate the many faiths and cultures represented in the school and to value individual differences. Leaders actively promote key British values, particularly respect, tolerance and individual freedom, as essential features of a liberal democratic society. As a result, pupils understand how discrimination and prejudice can undermine community cohesion.

36. Pupils learn about the key features of democratic societies through PSHE lessons and their wider involvement in school life. They study the differences between democracies and more authoritarian societies. Pupils gain practical experience of democracy through elections to the school council. Pupils who favour particular charities also give presentations on their work. The school then votes to determine which charity they should support in the year ahead.

37. In the early years, staff support children to learn the difference between right and wrong. They teach children to take turns, share and co-operate when taking part in different activities. Through positive reinforcement, modelling of kind behaviour and structured routines, staff promote children's positive engagement in school life. Older pupils explore the relationship between rules and freedom, learn how laws are made and study the role of the police. They take part in discussions of contemporary moral issues such as the role of social media and how to respond to environmental challenges. As a result, pupils learn how moral and ethical issues affect school life and the wider community.

38. Leaders ensure that pupils hear from a range of external speakers, including doctors, dentists and successful sportsmen and women. This broadens their awareness of different careers pathways. Through the PSHE programme, pupils consider how subjects pursued in the senior school at examination level relate to different careers. However, leaders have not developed this programme of careers advice sufficiently for pupils in Years 7 and 8.

39. Leaders promote pupil leadership opportunities through a wide range of activities. Those elected to the school and boarding councils communicate the thoughts and wider suggestions of the pupil body to staff. Older pupils visit the pre-prep regularly to support children there. Pupils captain sports teams within their age groups and take on the roles of choir and orchestral leaders. As a result of a pupil initiative, Year 8 pupils run a football tournament for visiting teams and referee the matches.

40. Staff provide opportunities for pupils to learn about the local community and contribute to it. Each week, pupils visit a local care home to talk with the residents and play games with them. A partnership with a local primary school involves pupils from the two schools working together to prepare a concert for their families and members of the public. Pupils also take part in fundraising events to support local and national charities. As a result of these activities, staff successfully begin the process of preparing pupils for life in wider British society.

41. Leaders ensure that pupils develop an understanding of financial and economic matters and entrepreneurship. In the early years, children learn about money through the numeracy curriculum and role-play opportunities in their shops and cafés. They pretend to use credit cards and scanners, as well as money. Older pupils develop financial literacy through a scheme managed by a national bank. This teaches them about student loans, debt and mortgages. Pupils take part in financial

workshops which require them to work in small groups in a competitive investment exercise. An enterprise project requires pupils to work together to develop a business initiative. They then present to a qualified investment panel. As a result, pupil develop an understanding of budgeting, marketing and project management.

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

42. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

43. Governors and leaders ensure the effective implementation of carefully structured safeguarding procedures. Appropriately trained leaders with responsibility for safeguarding provide thorough, comprehensive training for all staff, including at induction. They support this training through regular updates, in line with statutory expectations. As a result, staff respond promptly to any concerns about pupils, pupil disclosures or allegations against adults working at the school.

44. Safeguarding policies meet statutory requirements. They are available to parents and prospective parents on the school's website. Members of the safeguarding team liaise effectively with external agencies, including the local authority and children's services. They participate appropriately in local safeguarding groups. These links enhance professional curiosity and strengthen the school's safeguarding practice. The safeguarding team make any required referrals to these agencies promptly so that pupils receive the support they need. Safeguarding leaders keep detailed records. They store these securely, and use them effectively to identify patterns, inform decisions and track outcomes.

45. Governors receive appropriate safeguarding training. They undertake a range of activities with leaders, staff and pupils. Governance oversight includes checks on the SCR and personnel files to ensure these are maintained accurately. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding report termly to the governing board. Governors audit safeguarding procedures each year and review the safeguarding policy annually. They ensure that it is updated in line with statutory requirements. However, when the inspection began, the school did not record all the required pre-employment checks on the SCR. This was rectified before the conclusion of the on-site inspection.

46. Pupils can share concerns with trusted adults, both directly and anonymously. Staff teach pupils how to stay safe online during PSHE and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons. Leaders implement appropriate filtering and monitoring of the school's internet. They review the effectiveness of these systems regularly and respond promptly to any notifications of potentially inappropriate use.

47. Suitably trained leaders implement safer recruitment procedures effectively. No adult begins work at the school before the required pre-employment checks have been completed.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Cheltenham College Preparatory School
Department for Education number	916/6033
Registered charity number	311720
Address	Cheltenham College Preparatory School Thirlestaine Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL53 7AB
Phone number	01242 522697
Email address	prep-reception@cheltenhamcollege.org
Website	www.cheltenhamcollege.org
Proprietor	The Council of Cheltenham College
Chair	Mr William Straker-Nesbit
Headteacher	Mr Tom O'Sullivan
Age range	3 to 13
Number of pupils	460
Number of boarding pupils	79
Date of previous inspection	25 to 27 April 2023

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Information about the school

49. Cheltenham College Preparatory School is a co-educational day and boarding school located in the town of Cheltenham in Gloucestershire. It is part of Cheltenham College with the co-educational senior school nearby. The schools share some facilities. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors.

50. There is one co-educational boarding house. In addition to full boarding, the school offers flexi- and weekly boarding options. Boarders are accommodated in dormitories in the main building.

51. There are 90 children in the early years, comprising one Nursery and two Reception classes.

52. The school has identified 38 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are no pupils in the school who have an education, health and care plan.

53. The school has identified English as an additional language for 16 pupils.

54. The school states its aim is to equip pupils to lead fulfilled and purposeful lives by providing an excellent all-round education founded on Christian principles.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	28 to 30 April 2026

55. A team of 6 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

56. 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
- visits to the boarding house accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

57. 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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