

School inspection report

26 to 28 November 2024

Bruern Abbey School

Chesterton Manor

Chesterton

Bicester

Oxfordshire

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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 proprietorial body provides purposeful oversight of leaders' work and ensures that leaders have the knowledge, skills and understanding to carry out their roles effectively. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated and reflect the most recent statutory guidance. Policies are implemented consistently across the school to promote the wellbeing of pupils.
2. Leaders have designed a broad and rich curriculum that is adapted well to meet the specific needs of pupils. Leaders have carefully considered the organisation of the school day to enable pupils to gain the knowledge and skills they need to achieve well and to widen their interests. Pupils make good progress across the full range of subjects that they study.
3. There is a consistent focus on developing pupils' literacy and language across the school and across subjects. Pupils quickly grow in confidence and fluency in reading, speaking and writing. They practise and apply their literacy skills across all subjects. Pupils become confident, independent learners and effective communicators. This is a significant strength.
4. Pupils behave well. Relationships across the school are positive and respectful. This is evident throughout the school day and during boarding hours. Staff support pupils well to learn the strategies that help them manage their emotions and interact positively with each other and with adults.
5. The provision for boarding is well managed. Boarders are well supervised at all times. They make good use of their recreational time and participate in a range of activities in the evenings. Boarders have regular opportunities to share their views about boarding provision, which helps leaders continue to improve the boarding experience.
6. There is a suitable and well-planned programme in place for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, relationships and sex education (RSE), and careers advice and guidance. Life skills lessons help prepare older pupils for living independently.
7. Leaders maintain a positive culture of safeguarding. Staff receive regular and relevant training. They are confident to identify and report concerns that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Pupils know that they can speak to staff if they are worried or have concerns.
8. Leaders ensure that all required recruitment checks are carried out before a member of staff takes up their employment at the school. Leaders work closely with external agencies, including the police, local authority safeguarding partnerships and children's services, to safeguard pupils and staff.

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:

- strengthen the arrangements for evaluating the impact of the school's pastoral and therapeutic provision on pupils' attendance and achievement.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Pupils' emotional and physical wellbeing and their academic achievement are at the heart of leaders' decision making. Leaders have a clear vision for the school. Staff in all roles understand the part they play in realising this vision. During their time at the school, pupils grow in confidence and acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be well prepared for the next stage of their education.
10. There is a systematic and rigorous approach to governance. The proprietorial body is well informed and holds leaders to account for their work. The proprietor ensures that leaders have the relevant knowledge and skills so that that the Independent School Standards (ISSR) and the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for boarding schools are consistently met.
11. The school's development plan is informed through thoughtful self-evaluation. Leaders focus on developing the school's provision and improving outcomes in terms of pupils' academic achievement and wellbeing. However, leaders do not take full account of the positive impact of the school's wide-ranging pastoral and therapeutic provision on pupils' wellbeing, achievement and attendance in their evaluation of the school's work.
12. Leaders demonstrate a clear commitment to training and continuous professional development for school staff, including safeguarding and health and safety. Leaders ensure that policies reflect current statutory guidance. Policies and procedures are implemented consistently across the school sites.
13. Leaders' approach to risk assessment is thorough, well managed and clearly understood by staff. Documents are suitably detailed and reflect leaders' careful consideration of potential risks. Leaders regularly review the arrangements that are in place to reduce identified risks and adjust arrangements as appropriate. Clear systems of communication across the school enable staff to respond promptly to any necessary changes in routines, including boarding.
14. The school's complaints policy reflects statutory requirements and is published on the school's website. Suitable records of complaints are maintained. Leaders ensure that complaints are handled in accordance with the policy and in a timely way.
15. Leaders work effectively with a range of external agencies, including multiple local authority children's services, safeguarding partnerships and the police. Leaders provide an annual account of expenditure to the relevant local authority in relation to pupils who are in receipt of an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
16. Leaders ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010. This includes through the effective implementation and review of the school's accessibility plan.

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 and staff are ambitious for pupils' learning and progress. Leaders provide a broad and rich curriculum that enables pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding of science, technology, languages and the arts, as well as developing their proficiency in English and in mathematics.
19. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school's admissions process helps identify and assess the needs of pupils so that staff can put appropriate provision in place to meet their needs from the moment they join the school. Pupils' academic progress is carefully monitored and regularly reviewed. Parents receive regular information about the progress and attainment of their child during the school year.
20. Leaders have carefully considered the structure of the school's curriculum and the organisation of the school day to help pupils make the most of their time in school. Teaching is meticulously planned to help pupils build on what they know and understand. Staff are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach and the individual needs of pupils. Staff skilfully adapt their teaching to enable pupils to make good progress across the broad range of subjects that they study.
21. Staff throughout the school and across the curriculum demonstrate a deep understanding of language development and the strategies that enable pupils to develop their literacy skills. Teaching is informed through detailed diagnostic assessment of pupils' literacy knowledge, skills and understanding. Lessons and focused support sessions help pupils secure the knowledge they need quickly to become confident and fluent readers, speakers and writers. Teaching enables pupils to practise and extend their vocabulary. Focused teaching of subject-specific vocabulary helps pupils secure their knowledge and deepen their understanding of concepts and ideas. Pupils extend their language learning to acquiring a modern foreign language. The school's coordinated and consistent approach to literacy enables pupils to enjoy learning across the curriculum and to achieve success. Pupils become confident and eloquent communicators.
22. Pupils develop strategies that support their independence. Pupils readily access the resources they need to help them in lessons and in independent study. Staff anticipate and address pupils' misconceptions. In subjects such as mathematics, teaching helps pupils break down more complex tasks into manageable steps. This helps pupils work with accuracy and improve their fluency.
23. Staff check pupils' understanding in lessons through purposeful questioning and regular check-ins. In lessons, staff refer to previous learning and check that pupils' knowledge is secure before moving on to new content. Pupils receive regular feedback and understand what they need to do to improve their work. Because of the way that pupils' work is organised and stored, pupils can refer to previous learning when they need to remind themselves about a particular process or idea. Pupils make good use of assistive technologies to help them record their work.
24. Leaders ensure that the curriculum and teaching prepares pupils well for a range of examinations and qualifications. A significant number of pupils in the preparatory school successfully complete Common Entrance (CE) or go on to study at mainstream schools. Pupils in the senior school follow suitable courses that lead to a range of relevant qualifications including functional skills and GCSEs. GCSE subject choices are informed by pupils' interests and aspirations for future study and careers.
25. Pupils participate positively in music and drama. Pupils learn musical instruments and sing regularly. They develop their musical knowledge and skills and perform confidently. Pupils learn dramatic

techniques that enable them to communicate through gestures and facial expressions. Music and drama are integrated into the curriculum and the life of the school through chapel, productions and regular performances. The performing arts contribute positively to pupils' academic achievement and the development of their social and emotional skills.

26. Pupils take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sports and outdoor activities, games and crafts. Boarders enjoy the varied programme of evening activities, which, they say, keeps them interested and busy.

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

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

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

28. Leaders understand the importance of developing pupils' positive perceptions of their learning and achievements to help them grow in confidence and self-esteem, and to increase their wellbeing. The school's pastoral and therapeutic provision complements the school's academic and wider curriculum, and the positive experiences of those who board. Pupils quickly gain in confidence because they feel they are listened to and that their needs are understood. Pupils see themselves as successful learners and as valued members of the school community.
29. There is a clear and consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Staff are well informed about pupils' needs. Staff support pupils to learn strategies that help them regulate their behaviour, manage their emotions, and communicate respectfully and clearly with each other and with adults. Leaders ensure that allegations of bullying and potential bullying incidents are dealt with swiftly.
30. Pupils are considerate and polite. They are respectful of each other's physical and emotional space. Pupils take responsibility for their own behaviour. They understand how their actions can affect others.
31. Pupils learn to think for themselves and find ways to resolve difficulties, including when things don't go to plan. Pupils work positively as part of a team, for example when organising their own group activities and games at breaktimes, or when they are learning in forest school. Pupils encourage and support each other and readily celebrate each other's success and achievements.
32. Pupils take part in a wide range of physical activities. They decide which kinds of physical activities they prefer. Team sports are on offer alongside individual pursuits. Pupils understand the importance of maintaining physical health to support mental and emotional wellbeing.
33. There is a suitable programme to support pupils' learning in PSHE and RSE. Pupils learn the characteristics of healthy relationships and to be respectful of people's boundaries. Pupils are suitably informed and respectful when discussing different types of relationships. Staff are well trained to teach PSHE and RSE. Teachers check that pupils have secured their knowledge and understanding in PSHE and RSE through regular discussions and quizzes. The RSE policy, which has been developed in consultation with parents, pupils and staff, is up to date and published on the school's website.
34. Pupils are well supervised and cared for throughout the school day and when boarding. Menus are planned to provide a healthy variety of meals and snacks. Comfortable sleeping and living accommodation are provided for boarders across the two school sites. There is suitable provision for boarders to store their possessions. Boarders make the most of recreational times in the evenings and participate in a range of activities that promote positive interactions and enjoyment. Older boarders choose a balance between evening activities and independent study.
35. Pupils take pride in carrying out a range of roles in school, such as looking after the school animals and carrying out responsibilities associated with formal supper evenings. Prefects are clear about their responsibilities and consider how they can support and act as positive role models for younger pupils. Pupils speak positively about their experiences of being welcomed into the school and quickly integrating as members of a community in which they feel they belong.

36. Pupils know that staff are there to help them if they have worries or concerns. Independent listeners are available for boarders to raise questions or issues they may have. Staff and school dogs support pupils whose anxieties make it difficult for them to participate well in lessons or activities.
37. Staff work closely with families to support a smooth transition for pupils into the school. Some pupils participate in summer schools. This helps pupils become familiar with school staff and the surroundings before they join the school.
38. Pupils have high rates of attendance. This includes pupils who have previously had low attendance or who have experienced school-related anxiety. Leaders carefully monitor pupils' absence and help pupils sustain positive patterns of attendance. Working closely with pupils and parents, leaders gain a detailed understanding of each pupil's needs and experiences. This helps ensure that the right strategies are in place to help pupils overcome potential barriers to attendance. These may include participation in focused group activities that help pupils develop their social skills and confidence, or therapeutic and counselling support. Maintaining high rates of attendance positively impacts pupils' participation in school life, their learning and their achievement. Leaders promptly report to the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times. The school's attendance policy reflects the most recent statutory guidance and is published on the school's website.
39. Provision is in place to support the mental health and wellbeing of members of the school community. Leaders and staff work closely with pupils and their families to help overcome anxieties and concerns that may have an impact on pupils' emotional wellbeing and their attendance at school. Staff receive regular training and guidance to extend their knowledge and skills so that they can help pupils in a sensitive way to manage their emotions and behaviour and participate positively in learning. Staff are well equipped to support pupils so that they feel safe, happy and successful in school.
40. Pupils access a range of therapeutic and pastoral support, including occupational therapy and counselling. Coaching in positive psychology helps develop pupils' confidence in managing social situations. The school's pastoral and therapeutic provision contributes positively to pupils' social and emotional development as well as enabling pupils to engage well with learning so that they make good progress and achieve successful outcomes.
41. Leaders maintain high standards of health and safety across the school. Staff responsible for health and safety are well trained and knowledgeable. They carry out regular health and safety checks and maintain clear and detailed records. Staff are vigilant and promptly report any health and safety concerns that arise between routine checks. Records show that issues are quickly followed up and rectified. Regular fire drills, including at night, ensure that staff, pupils and boarders are familiar with emergency evacuation procedures.
42. Effective procedures are in place to store and administer medication in a safe and secure way. Leaders work closely with parents to ensure that medical and boarding staff have access to accurate and current information about pupils' medical needs. Detailed records are maintained and reviewed regularly. Accidents are recorded promptly on the school's online system. Leaders routinely consider the circumstances and numbers of incidents requiring first aid. They act promptly to put in place any additional measures to reduce the risk of accidents to pupils and staff. Staff are easily accessible throughout the night for boarders who may be unwell.

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

43. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

44. The curriculum for religious education (RE) provides pupils with a broad knowledge and understanding of different religions and beliefs. Through discussion, pupils explore moral issues and the principles of right and wrong. Pupils consider individual choices based on personal commitments and beliefs. For example, pupils in Year 8 explore the concept of pacifism from different perspectives. Leaders ensure that pupils are presented with an informed and balanced view of topics.
45. Pupils learn to empathise and are respectful of each other's differences. Pupils are well informed about issues of equality. They are confident to discuss aspects such as race, gender and relationships in a mature way, and recognise the importance of the law to protect people from discrimination. Pupils are respectful of each other's views, opinions and experiences.
46. There is a suitable careers programme in place for pupils from Year 7. Leaders have used the Gatsby benchmarks to audit the school's careers provision. Pupils consider their individual attributes and interests that make them suited to different types of careers. Pupils explore a wide range of options including by attending careers fairs, listening to guest speakers and visiting businesses. This helps inform pupils' subject choices and qualification pathways. Purposeful work experience placements are also facilitated by the school. Pupils learn the skills necessary to take part in interviews and construct a curriculum vitae. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about their aspirations for the future and how they are working towards this.
47. Pupils increase their understanding of community responsibility through activities such as working to improve the local environment by planting trees and bulbs. Pupils work to raise funds for local charities and are supported well to understand the aims of these charities and the purpose of their work.
48. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community. Leaders regularly seek feedback from pupils about their experiences of school. Pupils are consulted about decisions that will affect them, for example the arrangements for boarding and recreational time. Pupils appreciate leaders' decision-making because leaders ensure that pupils understand the rationale for those decisions. Older pupils recognise the impact of leaders' decision-making on pupils' wellbeing and positive relationships in school, for example, by restricting the use of mobile phones.
49. Pupils are well prepared to play a positive role in society. They have a secure knowledge and understanding of equalities, the rule of law, democracy and the importance of mutual respect. Through the PSHE curriculum and life skills lessons, pupils learn practical skills such as learning how to manage a budget and understanding the responsibilities associated with credit and borrowing money.
50. Pupils celebrate different customs and traditions as part of the school year. This includes celebratory dinners which help pupils deepen their cultural understanding and practise their social skills. Pupils are given the freedom to explore the school's natural environment during breaktimes and as part of forest school. Pupils clearly understand the school's boundaries. Pupils are trusted to act responsibly, while receiving the support they need to remain safe at all times.

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

51. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

52. Leaders have established a positive culture of safeguarding. Boarding and school staff are alert to the particular needs and vulnerabilities of pupils. Staff are vigilant and prompt to share any concerns that a pupil may be at risk of harm.
53. Designated safeguarding leaders and staff receive relevant and regular safeguarding training. Staff are knowledgeable. They demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of potential safeguarding risks, including risks associated with the context of the school.
54. The school's systems for recording and reporting safeguarding concerns are well understood by staff and are used effectively to record and report concerns. Leaders maintain detailed safeguarding records including actions taken by leaders to follow up concerns. Leaders have established effective partnerships across multiple agencies, including the police, social services, the local safeguarding partnership and the local authority designated officers.
55. Staff understand the importance of reporting any low-level concerns about adults working in the school. A suitable log of low-level concerns is kept, and prompt action is taken to ensure that staff and pupils are appropriately supported. Where necessary, reports are made to the local authority.
56. Filtering systems are in place to monitor internet use and restrict pupils' access to inappropriate content when they are using the internet during the school day and during boarding hours. Boarders' access to mobile phones during recreational times is well managed. Pupils learn through their PSHE and information technology (IT) lessons, assemblies and tutor times how to keep themselves and others safe, including when they are using the internet.
57. The record of appointments is meticulously maintained and accurate. Recruitment procedures are rigorous. All required safeguarding checks are carried out before a member of staff can take up their appointment at the school. Leaders provide clear and detailed induction training for all new staff, including safeguarding training, which staff must complete before they join the school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Bruern Abbey School
Department for Education number	931/6106
Address	Bruern Abbey School Chesterton Manor Chesterton Bicester Oxfordshire OX26 1UY
Phone number	01869 242448
Email address	secretary@bruernabbey.org
Website	www.bruernabbey.org
Proprietor	Bellevue Education International Ltd
Chair	Steve Wade
Headteacher	John Floyd
Age range	7 to 17
Number of pupils	220
Number of boarding pupils	162
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 December 2021

Information about the school

59. Bruern Abbey School is a boarding and day school which caters for neurodiverse boys aged 7 to 17 who have dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and other diagnoses. The preparatory school is in Chesterton, Bicester. The senior school, which is located in Chilton, Aylesbury, opened in 2021. Since then, the proprietor has extended the provision at the senior school one year group at a time. From September 2024 the senior school has included pupils in Year 9, Year 10 and Year 11.
60. The preparatory and senior schools provide accommodation for weekly boarding, including provision for flexi-boarding.
61. The school has identified all pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Fifty-eight pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
62. No pupils at the school speak English as an additional language.
63. The school states its aims are to prepare pupils diagnosed with learning difficulties for the Common Entrance (CE), GCSE and other examinations so that they can continue their education successfully in mainstream settings.

Inspection details

26 to 28 November 2024

64. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

65. 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 of the proprietary board
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the forest school 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.

66. 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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