

School inspection report

7 to 9 October 2025

St Edward's School

Cirencester Road

Charlton Kings

Cheltenham

GL53 8EY

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 have a well-informed working knowledge of the school's operation. They ensure that senior leaders are supported appropriately to secure continuous improvements to pupils' experiences across the school. Governors and senior leaders work closely together so that the Standards and requirements are met consistently and the school aims are suitably fulfilled.
2. Leaders demonstrate a clear and ongoing commitment to providing an education which is tailored to individual pupils' needs. Pupils experience a wide range of academic and co-curricular activities, supported by an effective and well-managed pastoral support network.
3. Pupils achieve well from their starting points, especially at A level. They work towards clear targets, which typically contribute effectively to their motivation to learn.
4. Pupils' physical, mental and emotional wellbeing is prioritised. The school's wellbeing hub provides effective support. Pupils know that help is readily available if it is needed. The positive relationships between pupils and staff underpin the happy and purposeful atmosphere around the school.
5. The school has effective and well-established procedures for identifying, supporting and monitoring the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Individual education plans, targeted support strategies and regular assessment combine to support pupils to achieve well.
6. Changes to the school's approach to assessment are focused appropriately on sharpening the accuracy of information gathering about what pupils know and can do. However, this process has not been fully adopted and embedded across all subject areas. Consequently, some pupils do not achieve as consistently well as they could.
7. The school premises are maintained so that pupils' health, safety and welfare are secure. However, while pupils are safe, some planned maintenance work is not completed quickly enough.
8. Pupils of all ages are respectful and caring. They show sensitivity to those from different backgrounds and traditions. The school's values are well promoted in the diverse community. As a result, pupils build positive friendships and value their peers' individual differences.
9. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities have secure knowledge of local and national arrangements. They work effectively with relevant external agencies. Safeguarding processes and procedures are robust, including those supporting pupils' online safety. Staff are well trained. They understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Safer recruitment checks are carried out diligently to ensure that all required checks are completed before any new staff begin their employment.

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:

- check that the improved processes for evaluating pupils' progress are fully utilised and consistently well embedded across all subject areas so that pupils achieve their potential in all aspects of their learning
- ensure that the maintenance of facilities across the premises is appropriately prioritised and actioned in a timely manner.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Together with the proprietor, governors monitor the school's work effectively. They ensure that leaders have the skills and knowledge to provide clear strategic direction for the school. They maintain close oversight of the Standards systematically through a series of committees linked to various aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding and staff recruitment.
11. Senior leaders report regularly to governors on their areas of responsibility. As a result, governors gain detailed information on the school's operation, including about pupils' welfare and progress. They fulfil their responsibilities effectively in challenging and supporting the school to continue to improve, so that the Standards are met consistently.
12. The school's development plan is appropriately focused on pupils' welfare, achievement and facility improvements. Managers target key areas to continue to enhance and develop pupils' educational experiences. For example, they use the 'future building' study skills programme to support pupils' independent study and to enhance classroom learning.
13. The school's values are at the heart of leaders' work and are embedded in the school's aims and ethos. This focus is reflected, for example, in the pastoral support for pupils, such as in the wellbeing hub and the specialist nursing and care team. Teachers promote pupils' emotional wellbeing and welfare effectively. They understand that this is important and so ensure that pupils are supported to achieve well.
14. The quality of teaching and learning is checked regularly through leaders' visits to lessons and routine checks on pupils' progress. Regular departmental meetings review the information gathered. This informs ongoing staff training effectively, so that good practice is shared.
15. The school meets its requirements under the Equality Act (2010). Arrangements incorporate equality in planning to ensure increased access to the school and to the curriculum for those pupils who have a disability. Equality and inclusion underpin leaders' decision-making and inform the support for pupils' individual needs effectively.
16. Risk management is effective. Leaders maintain an appropriate overall focus on risk, which supports pupils' wellbeing and needs. For example, risk assessments identify potential hazards and determine the appropriate action to mitigate the risk of harm. Occasionally, while pupils are safe, some outstanding maintenance issues are not followed up as promptly as they should be.
17. Leaders ensure that staff are accessible to parents. They deal with any concerns parents raise promptly and carefully. Complaints records track information and follow-up actions. Regular reviews appropriately inform any further actions needed to prevent potential recurrence of concerns. Information about how to raise concerns is available to parents on the school's website. They receive regular newsletters, as well as reports and updates about their child's progress and welfare. As a result, communication between home and school is effective.
18. The school's website provides accessible and clear information for staff, pupils and parents of both current and prospective pupils. All the required policies and documents are available.

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

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. The school offers a broad and relevant curriculum so that pupils' needs and abilities are met. It covers a range of suitable subjects, including technology and the creative arts, such as drama, photography and art and design. In the sixth form, programmes include, for example, psychology, further mathematics and drama. A recently introduced BTEC course in business studies caters for those who may wish to explore alternative pathways to higher education, other than the university route. At GCSE, the school tailors the curriculum to individual pupils' needs, offering options in classical civilisation, drama, food preparation and nutrition. As a result, the curriculum successfully meets pupils' age-related needs, aptitudes and interests.
21. The popularity of subject choices, such as drama, art and design and technology, reflects the pupils' enthusiasm for creative subjects. High-quality artwork is evident in displays across the school. Pupils lead and direct productions enthusiastically, including the recent performance of 'The Railway Children'. They enjoy and commit readily to group participation in major school events.
22. Pupils are encouraged to experience a range of languages, including Latin as well as traditional European languages, before specialising in at least one language at GCSE. Their scientific, mathematical and technological skills are promoted through thoughtful teaching and well-selected resources. Pupils' progress in GCSE subjects is further enhanced through support to develop their organisational skills, as well as their learning and study habits.
23. Subject leaders have good subject knowledge. They take pupils' needs and interests into account in their lesson plans and in their teaching. Subject 'clinics' operated as after-school clubs aim to stimulate pupils' interest and wider learning. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects inspires pupils to learn, to think for themselves and to achieve well. Pupils use their analytical skills thoughtfully, for example, in mathematics, by breaking down problems into manageable steps. Similarly, in art, pupils reflect on their work to continue to improve their technique and expression.
24. Pupils typically achieve well across subjects at GCSE and at A level. Most pupils gain entry to their first-choice university. Some pupils go on to higher and degree-level apprenticeships. Parents receive regular information on their child's progress through half-termly assessments and end of term reports. Across the curriculum, teaching supports the principles of fundamental British and global values, which raises pupils' awareness of their local community, the United Kingdom and the wider world.
25. Pupils who have SEND make good progress from their different starting points. This is because they receive appropriate individual and targeted support in lessons. Teachers are well trained to support the range of pupils' needs. Consequently, they understand what they need to do. They apply this information effectively so that pupils achieve well.
26. The small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive additional support to help them acquire technical and subject-specific language. These pupils learn and achieve successfully over their time in school.
27. Revised systems focus on improving the checking and analysis of information about pupils' progress. Leaders aim for regular updates to pupils' learning targets to improve the accuracy of assessment, so that gaps in pupils' learning are filled quickly. Although the system is widely used across year groups,

it is not yet fully embedded. This means that in some subject areas, assessment information is not analysed and applied effectively enough to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they could.

28. Positive reinforcement of pupils' learning, alongside typically supportive and constructive feedback from teachers, supports pupils to build subject knowledge and problem-solving skills effectively. Teachers encourage pupils to highlight the areas of their work that they get right or wrong. In doing so, pupils develop an understanding of their learning and progress and how they can improve further.
29. A suitable range of after-school activities, such as academic support clinics as well as sports such as hockey, rugby, football and cricket, effectively develops pupils' confidence, as well as their creative and physical skills. Pupils are self-motivated and so they are keen to join the clubs offered. They enjoy, for example, increasing their music or singing skills by joining a school choir, the orchestra, the concert band and other musical ensembles. These lead to opportunities to take part in local concerts within Cheltenham and further afield.
30. Pupils achieve well in individual and team sporting pursuits. Their high level of team participation reflects the enthusiasm that they have for sport in the school. Some pupils gain recognition at regional, county and national level, particularly in sports such as swimming, hockey and football. Other activities successfully extend learning beyond the classroom, including participation in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE). In addition, there are themed days out, such as a Year 9 educational visit to the Black Country Living Museum. These activities support character development and leadership opportunities, which enhance pupils' overall educational experience.

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

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

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

32. Pupil wellbeing is supported through well-developed and age-appropriate personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes. Key topics introduce pupils to the importance of tolerance, kindness and respect for individual differences at an early age. Older pupils appreciate and understand the importance of topics such as consent and inappropriate relationships. The programme enhances pupils' social skills. This is reflected in the positive, respectful and supportive relationships with teachers, including in the highly positive relationships noted in the sixth form.
33. Pupils are well supported by the effective pastoral team. The high level of mutual respect between staff and pupils, as well as the caring atmosphere, characterise the school's established focus on pupils' wellbeing. Pupils know they are safe in the family-like atmosphere where they are supported to succeed. They are clear about the range of staff they can turn to for help if they need it. The wellbeing team, for example, helps pupils to manage challenges, particularly during examination periods. The care offered to pupils combines appropriately with the flexible curriculum on offer, resulting in confident and self-assured individuals.
34. The school encourages high levels of respect for individual differences and presents pupils with opportunities to increase their spiritual knowledge and understanding beyond taught lessons. Pupils learn about different beliefs and cultures through, for example, assemblies and celebrations of national days, cultural and religious festivals. The school, although predominantly of Roman Catholic foundation, supports pupils in acts of worship that represent all the major world faiths. A small chapel is available for group worship and for individual prayer on a multi-faith basis.
35. The physical education (PE) programme and games curriculum promote the benefits of participation and exercise. Team games cater effectively for those who wish to compete and excel in their chosen sport. Increased provision for non-team players, particularly in the sixth form, includes recreational sports, for example, access to fitness training, badminton and swimming. Pupils enhance their personal fitness and their wellbeing in relaxed, purposeful and meaningful ways.
36. The school's behaviour policy sets out clear arrangements for rewarding pupils' positive behaviour and sanctions if any behaviour falls short of expectations. Leaders have created a culture in which praise is generously given and modestly received. Older pupils, for example, applaud the successes of younger pupils in celebration assemblies. They also act as mentors for younger pupils, offering support and encouragement in after-school academic clinics and sports activities.
37. Details of any behaviour incidents, including any perceived bullying, are centrally recorded and monitored by the pastoral team. This allows trends and patterns to be identified and addressed. Procedures to minimise bullying are successful, so instances are rare. If they do occur, pastoral support for both victims and perpetrators is effective. These thoughtfully applied measures help to promote the collegiate, family feel of the school.
38. Health and safety arrangements and responsibilities are set out clearly in school policy. All requirements are implemented effectively. Staff receive appropriate training, including on risk assessment and fire safety. Suitable precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire. Pupils are briefed about fire safety and practise fire evacuation procedures regularly.

39. Premises and accommodation are maintained to a suitable standard. Together with effective health and safety arrangements, this ensures that pupils are kept safe. Some aspects of maintenance, however, are not always suitably prioritised for completion in a timely manner. Although rectified during the inspection, delays in the maintenance of washroom facilities, for example, reduced the availability of toilet facilities for male pupils.
40. The medical room meets the needs of sick or injured pupils, or those who require first aid. It also provides a facility where pupils can seek physical or emotional support from either a wellbeing nurse or a student care leader. Qualified staff administer medication appropriately and first aid staff are up to date with training.
41. Pupils are appropriately supervised. They typically behave well in lessons and informally outside the classroom. Sixth-form pupils have a mentoring role which supports younger pupils to better understand and follow the school's high expectations of behaviour. Prefects lead the school council effectively. They are trained appropriately in their duties and responsibilities. These include assisting teachers in promoting positive behaviour. They take their mentoring role of junior pupils very seriously. Some prefects host drop-in support sessions for other pupils in the wellbeing hub at lunchtime.
42. Senior staff maintain admission registers effectively. They ensure that pupils' attendance is appropriately logged as required. The school informs the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times and when any pupil's longer-term absence raises concerns. Attendance information is appropriately tracked and analysed so that attendance irregularities are followed up quickly.

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. Leaders prepare pupils well for life in British society, for example, through opportunities to develop leadership and volunteering skills. Pupils gain adventurous training awards in the CCF and through participation in the DofE award scheme. They gain valuable leadership experience, acting as house and school prefects, charity ambassadors and by leading sports teams.
45. Pupils welcome the school's cohesive community and inclusive culture. They know they are treated equally, regardless of their personal identity, disabilities or beliefs. Pupils are confident to be themselves without fear of repercussions. They are well supported by the school. Respect for different cultures and faiths is reinforced in Chapel services, themed assemblies and events such as 'languages week' and Black History Month. Pupils of different faiths are confident in using the Chapel as their prayer room.
46. The positive relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff, are based on mutual respect. The clear sense of community, underpinned by the school's aims, is felt by all. The opportunities for pupils to contribute increase as they move through the school. They are encouraged to reflect on the way in which a community works and their obligations to others. As a result, pupils build their sense of right and wrong, accept responsibility for their actions and are eager to take on leadership positions from the wide range of roles available.
47. The PSHE and tutor group programme introduces pupils in Year 7 to topics such as managing money. Older pupils are introduced to financial matters such as savings, budgeting and managing a wage. In the sixth form, pupils are prepared for life beyond school, for example, by considering weekly food budgeting, and using credit cards. Such activities increase pupils' awareness of the importance of managing their finances and handling basic financial concepts.
48. The value of democracy is promoted through activities such as selection of senior prefects and school ambassadors. Pupils have the opportunity to engage with local politicians and council members during election periods, through the community involvement programme. As a result, pupils gain insight into how local councils operate. Teachers take care to ensure that discussion of politically related matters is impartial and representative of balanced views.
49. Pupils are aware of global issues through the school's charitable links, for example in raising funds for the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), supporting local food banks and a local refugee society. In addition, pupils can become charity ambassadors, raising funds for local charities. These activities allow pupils to gain valuable leadership and life experiences by helping others.
50. Careers guidance is delivered to younger pupils primarily through the PSHE programme and tutor group sessions, with the assistance of a bespoke online careers guidance service. Subject choices are considered prior to GCSE and A-level selection. Sixth-form pupils have tailored discussions with careers teachers and through a careers programme of work experience and careers fairs. There are well-established links with a variety of alumni to inform pupils about a wide range of career options. Pupils are well informed and suitably guided towards the next stage of their education and life after school.

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. Appropriate safeguarding processes and procedures are in place. Well-established links with local support agencies include social services, the local authority and the police. Leaders access their advice and support and make referrals when required. Detailed reviews of safeguarding incidents take place. Appropriate actions are taken as required. The rigour of such processes supports both the safety and wellbeing of pupils.
53. The proprietor ensures that safeguarding arrangements are effective. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSL have dedicated time, with appropriate systems and procedures in place so they are supported to fulfil their roles in line with requirements.
54. Senior leaders and governors ensure that policies reflect current legislation and check that they are implemented consistently through regular reviews and audits. They challenge leaders appropriately to ensure the requirements are met.
55. The school provides the local authority with the required information relating to the use of funding for pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
56. Staff, at all levels, are well trained and regularly briefed on safeguarding matters. Those with designated safeguarding lead responsibilities receive appropriate higher-level training. Staff are knowledgeable in child protection procedures, including those linked to online safety and the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism.
57. There are appropriate arrangements for the filtering and monitoring of electronic systems and internet use. Leaders receive alerts so that potential risks in pupils' online activity can be addressed to protect pupils from harm.
58. Pupils have a well-developed sense of how to keep safe, including when using online technologies, particularly when accessing social media platforms. They are well supported in learning strategies for managing risks through their PSHE and RSE lessons. Pupils are confident that leaders and staff keep them safe. This is reflected in the high levels of trust and positive relationships with their teachers.
59. Checks on the suitability of staff and adults working with children are rigorous, and staff recruitment processes are effective. Leaders maintain an accurate central record of appointments. This is well monitored, including through external audits. As a result, safer recruitment processes are secure.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St Edward's School
Department for Education number	916/6032
Registered charity number	293360
Address	St Edward's School Cirencester Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL53 8EY
Phone number	01242 388555
Email address	a.sandford@stedwards.co.uk
Website	www.stedwards.co.uk
Proprietor	Alpha Schools Group (A S Southern Ltd)
Chair	Mr Ali Khan
Headteacher	Mrs Anna Sandford-Squires
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	222
Date of previous inspection	22 to 24 November 2022

Information about the school

61. St Edward's is an independent coeducational day school, situated on the outskirts of Cheltenham. The school was founded in 1987 and became part of the Alpha Schools Group in 2022. The group's directors provide governance of the school. Since the previous inspection a new headteacher has been appointed and took up her post in September 2024.
62. The school has identified 99 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
63. The school has identified English as an additional language for 23 pupils.
64. The school states that its aims are to provide a nurturing and intellectually stimulating environment where children are supported to grow in confidence, character, and ambition. It does this by offering a personalised education and by creating space for every learner to flourish. The intention is that pupils become the best version of themselves, prepared for a successful and meaningful future.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

7–9 October 2025

65. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

66. 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 proprietor
- 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

67. 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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