



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Bowdon Preparatory School for Girls

November 2022

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School's Details

School	Bowdon Preparatory School for Girls			
DfE number	358/6000			
Registered charity number	1142325			
Address	Bowdon Preparatory School for Girls Ashley Rd Altrincham Cheshire WA14 2LT			
Telephone number	01619 280678			
Email address	headmistress@bowdonprep.org.uk			
Headmistress	Mrs Helen Gee			
Chair of governors	Mrs Jennie Duchenes			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	265			
	EYFS	45	Juniors	220
Inspection dates	15 to 17 November 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Bowdon Preparatory School for Girls is an independent day school for female pupils. The school became a charitable trust in 2011 and the governors of the school also act as trustees.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection the curriculum has been reviewed to add breadth and strengthen the focus on developing skills for learning.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school's aim is to develop enthusiasm and a genuine love of learning based on good work habits and the development of independent critical thinking skills. The school seeks to create an environment which fosters the values of courtesy, tolerance and responsibility.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional backgrounds, mostly from families living in Altrincham and the surrounding area. Independent testing by the school indicates that the ability of the pupils is above average when compared to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified nine pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include dyslexia, visual impairment, physical difficulties, speech and language and medical difficulties and several of these receive additional specialist help. One pupil has an education, health and care plan (EHC) and 42 pupils have English as an additional language, one of whom receives additional specialist help.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- From an early age pupils develop sophisticated study skills to analyse, hypothesise and synthesise information.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are highly positive; they demonstrate excellent concentration and many spontaneously ask higher order questions.
- Pupils exhibit outstanding competence in both written and spoken language. They share and challenge opinions and work in successful collaboration across all areas of learning.
- Pupils make excellent progress in mathematics throughout the age range and successfully apply their skills across the curriculum.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils persevere when faced with challenging tasks demonstrating resilience and adaptability across the full range of the curriculum.
- Pupils have an outstanding understanding of how the decisions they make impact on their future success and well-being.
- Pupils' social skills are highly developed. They actively support each other to deepen their understanding in almost all lessons.
- Pupils' moral development is excellent as reflected in the quality of their behaviour, ensuring that the school values of courtesy, tolerance and responsibility are maintained.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Develop pupils' ability to select technology as an option to enhance their own learning in lessons across all phases of the school.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

3.5 Pupils develop a genuine love of learning and independent critical thinking skills which meets the aim of the school. From an early stage, pupils make excellent progress from a range of starting points. The results of internal assessments, scrutiny of books and lesson observations, show attainment and

progress for pupils of all abilities and needs, to be good, and in some cases rapid in relation to national age-related expectations. Pupils are highly successful in gaining entrance to their chosen senior schools. The vast majority secure places at state grammar schools or highly selective independent schools a number with awards for academic success. The high quality of outcomes is supported by the wide-ranging curriculum and breadth of opportunity available. All parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the range of subjects, including for online learning, is suitable for their children and a similarly high proportion also agreed that teaching enables their children to make progress.

- 3.6 Pupils' skills for learning develop to a high level across all areas of the curriculum. A comprehensive process to track and monitor pupil progress is used to identify children who require extra support so that appropriate strategies can be introduced early to narrow any gaps in learning. Pupil needs are very well understood. Pupils with additional needs or English as an additional language (EAL) make similar progress to other pupils because of the excellent quality of intervention provided. Sensitively targeted support in lessons or individual sessions is well managed, overseen and reviewed regularly. The most able children understand their own needs and successfully develop their learning and thinking in class by taking on increasingly challenging activities with great enthusiasm. Senior leaders ensure that staff receive high quality training to manage the needs of all the pupils resulting in strong outcomes for pupils of all abilities. Pupils have complete confidence in the ability of staff to find a way of helping them understand work that they find more challenging.
- 3.7 Pupils develop excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum due to the highly reflective learning approaches they are taught from an early stage. This includes an approach where pupils are asked to think for themselves and ask a friend before going to the teacher which younger pupils outlined in detail in interview. They are curious and creative learners who acquire new knowledge quickly and relish recording their work in different ways. For example, younger children take notes while watching a video and use this information confidently and accurately in a 'hot seat' situation as they answer questions as if they were Florence Nightingale. Older pupils undertake detailed research on how waste is managed and recycled and record their findings in highly imaginative ways using three-dimensional models and information boards. Regular high-quality marking and verbal feedback are provided in a way that constantly requires the pupils to think for themselves first, ensuring that their own process of reflection and review is a natural part of the learning process.
- 3.8 Pupils exhibit outstanding competence in their communication of both written and spoken language. From the EYFS upwards pupils are articulate and confidently express themselves in all walks of school life. Their written communication is exemplary across all age groups with extended writing being highly developed across the full range of genres. For example, younger pupils work very well collaboratively to produce a story containing all their characters with a beginning, middle, a twist and an end to use in a performance using shadow puppets they have made in a science and technology lesson. Older pupils demonstrate a mature understanding of emotion and empathy when discussing and writing about the nature of a character from a challenging text. Pupils communicate expressively through music, art, drama and a range of creative media. Opportunities for performance at all levels have developed strong outcomes for speaking and communicating in front of a range of audiences. Younger pupils demonstrate well-developed skills for drama as they rehearse for their nativity. Older pupils communicate highly effectively as they prepare and deliver a presentation as house captains on the subject of bullying and lead a discussion about the importance of kindness. Pupils develop their communications skills to the full as teachers have high expectations and senior leaders have been highly successful at developing and embedding opportunities for pupils to challenge themselves.
- 3.9 Pupils build excellent skills for the use of number and problem solving as they move through the school. They enjoy their mathematics lessons and thrive on taking on new challenges and working with others to solve problems. Pupils in discussions report that it is cool to enjoy mathematics in this school and this is reflected in their high levels of achievement. Younger pupils use accurate

mathematical vocabulary as they record objects around the room which are taller or shorter than themselves. Older pupils demonstrate a very strong understanding of number lines, to find equivalent fractions and determine missing values. They articulate their reasoning and apply knowledge of multiplication tables to excellent effect. The most able mathematicians demonstrate highly effective problem-solving skills and proudly support their peers when they need help. They undertake effective discussion to ascertain the most efficient way of approaching mathematical operations. These skills have been effectively applied as shown when a group won the bronze award in the national finals for a mathematics challenge.

- 3.10 Pupils build strong basic skills for use of technology by the time they leave the school. They are effective at researching areas of interest and when using the computers to word process their findings. They are adept at coding as demonstrated as pupils develop multi-level games of their own or design their own blogs to show off their skills in an area of their choice. They have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe online. Discrete lessons enable them to develop skills across a range of different platforms. They recognise the importance of IT as a tool to aid their learning and value their own competency as an essential ingredient to be successful in future learning and life. However, in some curriculum areas, pupils have more limited opportunity to self-initiate the use of communication technology as a spontaneous response to the activities they are undertaking to further enhance their learning.
- 3.11 Pupils of all ages display sophisticated study skills. They think for themselves confidently, hypothesise, accurately analyse data and text, and synthesise information with assurance. Younger pupils gather information about a historical figure and use it effectively in a hot seat situation and older pupils analyse and explain how long note patterns last and distinguish the difference between pulse and duration. They exhibit a demonstrably positive attitude to their learning and are highly engaged, making the most of the opportunities provided for them. They actively seek ways to go above and beyond what has been asked of them. They organise and plan their work effectively and use feedback to reflect on their knowledge and the skills taught. Peer appraisal is used efficiently to challenge their own understanding. Knowledgeable and dedicated teaching staff promote a positive learning environment which is inclusive and challenging at all times. Pupils' excellent study skills are a significant contributory factor to their high levels of achievement.
- 3.12 Pupils' achievements in extra-curricular activities are considerable for the age of the pupils and size of the school. Across all age groups they develop their own talents and interests to a high level through an extremely broad range and number of clubs available to them at different times of day. This extensive programme allows them to try out new skills and develop others including for STEM subjects, languages, creative enterprises, sporting opportunities, a wide range of individual and group musical clubs as well as creative writing and ICT sessions.
- 3.13 Pupils actively enjoy the range of sports available to them and all ages develop their physical fitness and skills to a good level. The school has been particularly successful in regional and national competitions for netball, athletics and swimming. Skills for the performing arts develop well from an early stage, as all pupils have regular opportunities for performance and enjoy specialist teaching in music and drama. Younger pupils develop a genuine love of music through singing and preparing for concerts. Older pupils are extremely successful in external drama examinations where almost all achieve the highest grades and through opportunities to perform at the local well-known theatre. Skills for artistic endeavour are well developed. Pupils work with a wide range of materials and styles with good results as they explore the work of different well-known artists.
- 3.14 Pupils' attitudes to learning are decidedly positive. They are highly productive in individual, paired and collaborative work. Engagement levels in lessons are excellent. The learning environment promotes inquisitive individuals whose contributions are valued, respected and developed, causing pupils to feel they are equal contributors to their learning. Pupils are confident to demonstrate initiative and be innovative and creative. From a very early age they learn how to manage their learning in a way that suits them rather than follow someone else's lead.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.15 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.16 Pupils develop extremely high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, enthusiastically challenging themselves to succeed. They understand and value the ethos of the school and are proud of their community. They persevere when faced with challenging tasks demonstrating resilience and adaptability which meets the school aim for pupils to believe, persevere and succeed. Year 6 pupils confirm that they already feel ready to move on to senior schools and the responsibilities they take on throughout the school are a significant factor in developing this level of maturity and readiness. This was also confirmed by parents in their responses to the questionnaire. Pupils are disciplined in their attitude to learning and seek countless opportunities to improve. The management team regularly consults the whole school community to develop and promote systems for personal development and pupils have a significant voice in this process. Pupils develop a strong awareness of their strengths and areas for development through the well-structured assembly programme, daily opportunities to spend time with their class teachers and a comprehensive personal social and health education (PSHE) curriculum.
- 3.17 The decision-making skills demonstrated by pupils across all age groups are developed to an extremely high level. The well embedded ethos of allowing pupils to develop their own way of approaching their work is a significant contributory factor of this development. Through wide-ranging leadership opportunities, pupils run committees and councils making decisions in the best interests of the school while considering the impact of these decisions on those around them. In the classroom they take control of their learning, making decisions about the presentation of their work, the level of challenge they seek and how they should approach their learning to meet the desired outcomes. They report that they feel well supported to make effective decisions whether this be with their work or their own personal well-being.
- 3.18 Pupils have an extremely strong awareness of the non-materialistic aspects of life. They have a robust appreciation of the world around them and their impact on it and a real love of life. They appreciate and respond to music and drama as a way of expressing themselves and recognise the value of these as a form of conveying emotion. They appreciate moments of quiet reflection such as having solo moments on a mountain overlooking Ullswater on a residential trip. Pupils use current affairs as a springboard for mature discussion and debate, enabling them to reflect well beyond their years on the challenging dimensions humanity faces such as the impact of global warming. Pupils actively enjoy sharing their own experience of religion and faith ensuring that their understanding of each other's spiritual life is strong and positive.
- 3.19 Pupil behaviour is exemplary and high standards are maintained both in school and off-site. The school values of courtesy, tolerance and responsibility are evident as pupils conduct their daily school lives. They contribute to the setting of school rules, taking ownership of these and their actions and seek to resolve problems when necessary. They quickly learn how to manage their own behaviour including towards others in school and they resolve conflict adeptly for their age. They have a strong understanding of the rule of law through exploration of news and current affairs topics. Pupils feel safe at school and identify any bullying as unacceptable. The older pupils and the staff are extremely good role-models who take on wide ranging responsibilities in a consistent way which successfully supports the development of the school community as a safe place where everyone's voice is heard.
- 3.20 Pupils' social skills are highly developed and are a strength of the school. They work collaboratively on tasks, consistently supporting each other to deepen their understanding in almost all lessons. Relationships between pupils across the school are outstanding, with older pupils readily supporting their younger peers in many activities, such as when supporting them at playtimes or reading with them in the library. Their positive presence within the school gives younger pupils, and those new to the school, a strong sense of family and partnership. Pupils show determination when faced with problems and believe that working together as part of a team will deliver the best outcomes such as

when organising whole school events or leading house meetings. They recognise that different pupils have different needs and delight in the celebration of all pupils' achievements.

- 3.21 Pupils demonstrate a genuine sense of care for one another. They want to make a difference and make their community a happy place. Pupil ambassadors and buddies ensure that everyone can have a happy and productive time in school whether in the classroom or in the playground. By Year 6 the incredibly wide range of responsibilities they take on contributes positively to their own well-being and that of pupils of all ages. School Council is run independently by the pupils who actively seek the ideas and opinions of others before taking their views to senior leaders for consideration. The media captains independently write and distribute the school newsletter being careful to represent everyone's news and opinions, strengthening their social responsibilities. Pupils are keen to raise money in self-generated initiatives and supply imaginative ideas for raising money to support groups close to their own hearts in the local community. This was demonstrated as the charity captains organised a collection of warm coats, toiletries and other essentials and then visited a homeless shelter to hand over the goods. They have a well-developed sense of responsibility for others less fortunate than themselves. Almost all parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire confirmed that the school helps their children to develop strong teamwork and social skills.
- 3.22 Pupils show high levels of curiosity, respect, tolerance and acceptance of different faiths, actively enjoying sharing their own customs and practices with each other. Pupils develop a strong sense of community at the school and feel that it is one big family. As a result, there is a seamless mutual respect between pupils of all cultures and backgrounds and between pupils and staff. Pupils have a strong sense of empathy and understanding for those from other cultures and an active curiosity about difference. They have a deep awareness of discrimination and the negative impact that can have on well-being. Their accepting and inclusive attitudes are developed through a comprehensive PSHE programme and in assemblies and regular theme days that focus on accepting everyone as an individual. All pupils warmly welcome new children to the school and are quick to offer them support to ensure that they settle in quickly and are confident in their new community.
- 3.23 Pupils develop an extremely good awareness of the importance of a balanced lifestyle in terms of diet, exercise and mental and emotional health. They enjoy a wide range of sporting activities and make good choices in terms of diet and food and are appreciative of the high-quality healthy food they are provided with at school. Pupils are aware of the need to be emotionally healthy and understand the benefit of taking time out for reflection or listening to music and having time with their friends. They understand that they have people they can turn to for advice and support. Their awareness of the need to be safe when using the internet or mobile phones is strong from a very early stage. The allocated time for PSHE is a significant factor allowing pupils time and space to discuss sensitive issues important to them. The strong focus on e-safety across the school in PSHE and computing lessons as well as assemblies and themed events, results in pupils having a strong awareness of what to do if they receive material, with which they are not comfortable. They are well prepared for the next phase of their education.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors and safeguarding governor. They observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended house meetings. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Diane Gardiner	Reporting inspector
Mrs Sarah Fisher	Compliance team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Tanya Hill	Team inspector (Deputy head academic, IAPS school)