

School inspection report

4 to 6 November 2025

Bowdon Preparatory School

Ashley Road
Altrincham
Cheshire
WA14 2LT

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'.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS | 3 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS..... | 4 |
| RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS | 4 |
| SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE..... | 5 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE | 6 |
| SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION | 7 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION | 8 |
| SECTION 3: PUPILS' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING | 9 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING | 10 |
| SECTION 4: PUPILS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY..... | 11 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY | 12 |
| SAFEGUARDING | 13 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING | 13 |
| SCHOOL DETAILS | 14 |
| INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL..... | 15 |
| INSPECTION DETAILS | 16 |

Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors ensure that policies and procedures are implemented effectively through the actions of their various committees, which focus on the Standards. Governors take their roles seriously. They visit the school regularly to speak with leaders, staff and pupils to gather information that informs their rigorous oversight.
2. Leaders prioritise pupils' wellbeing in the decisions they make. They have created a school culture that both promotes and celebrates pupils' individuality. Pupils are happy, positive and benefit from a learning environment that focuses on their unique characteristics.
3. Pupils achieve well and make good progress in all areas of learning. This supports their preparation for the next stages of their education and adult lives. The school promotes a healthy balance between developing pupils' academic achievements and their personal development.
4. The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is well developed. The early identification of their additional needs, coupled with effective support, ensures that pupils who have SEND make good progress from their individual starting points.
5. The development of pupils' self-esteem, self-knowledge and self-confidence is a significant strength of the school. Pupils are taught to understand their own strengths and areas for development. They respond positively to the guidance given by their teachers. Pupils interact politely and eloquently with each other and with adults. They socialise and thrive in an environment where they feel valued and safe.
6. Policies and systems to support pupils' behaviour and to address bullying are well integrated into school life. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour and bullying are rare. Pupils appreciate that any reported concerns are dealt with swiftly and appropriately.
7. Leaders make sure that every pupil is given a position of responsibility in their final year at the school. This enhances pupils' leadership abilities and encourages social accountability. These roles enable pupils to make valuable contributions across various aspects of school life. Additionally, this fosters a positive, mutually beneficial environment for the entire community. This deliberate and planned approach reflects leaders' commitment to developing pupils' personal and social skills and equipping them to be effective and responsible citizens in later life.
8. Safeguarding arrangements across the school are secure. All staff undertake regular training. However, greater attention should be given to ensure that staff fully understand the terminology associated with whistleblowing and reporting low-level concerns to support the practice already in place for these areas.
9. Processes for the safer recruitment of staff are secure. Regular oversight by safeguarding leads, including at governance level, ensures that all pre-employment checks are undertaken in a timely manner.

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 staff fully understand the terminology regarding both whistleblowing and reporting low-level concerns so that they follow these consistently and confidently.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders at all levels possess the skills and expertise to ensure consistent adherence to the Standards. Governors organise their committee activities according to specific components of the Standards. This enables a focused approach in carrying out their responsibilities. They conduct regular reviews and evaluate how effectively policies, systems and leaders' actions are implemented through consultations with staff, pupils and during on-site visits. Governors collaborate efficiently with school leaders, sharing their specialised knowledge and posing thoughtful questions regarding leaders' decisions. This supports the school's continuous improvement.
11. Leaders successfully uphold the school's vision and values. They set clear goals, maintain high standards and establish effective systems that foster inclusion and develop pupils' understanding of responsibility and service. Leadership opportunities, such as reading champions, school council members and class ambassadors, give pupils meaningful ways to be involved and contribute to school life. Policies are thoughtfully developed, clearly communicated and applied consistently so that both staff and pupils understand the routines and expectations that support pupils' wellbeing.
12. Leaders show secure understanding and management of risk. They ensure documentation is robust, facilitate regular reviews and provide relevant training for staff. As well as risk being effectively assessed for areas such as health and safety, leaders also consider the impact of their decision-making in other areas of school life. For example, when leaders recently revised the school's assessment tracking system, they reflected on the best way forward, noting that a quick, unconsidered approach may have unintended consequences.
13. Leaders handle complaints in line with the school's policy and procedures. Regular meetings with parents, both formally and informally, help to ensure that any concerns are dealt with promptly and effectively.
14. Leaders in the early years ensure that the requirements of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework are fully met. These are consistently implemented in the teaching and learning that children experience. Leaders support staff to care for children well, for example by ensuring that appropriate staff-to-child ratios are in place throughout the school day.
15. Leaders establish effective links with outside agencies to support pupils' safety and development. Besides those relating to safeguarding, such as the local social services and the local authority leads, leaders liaise with health professionals such as speech and language therapists and children's mental health support teams. As a result, leaders ensure that pupils receive appropriate support and guidance.
16. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Equality of opportunity is a key focus for leaders. Leaders emphasise the importance of diversity and inclusion in their decision-making. This is reflected in pupils' sense of belonging within the school community, where everyone is valued equally. The school's detailed accessibility plan supports leaders' drive for equality of opportunity. The plan includes aspects such as physical movement around the site and ensuring the curriculum is accessed effectively by all pupils.
17. All the required information is made available to parents of current and prospective pupils. Most of this is through the school's comprehensive website. This includes details of required policies, such as for relationships and sex education (RSE) and safeguarding as well as arrangements for pupils who

have SEND. Information relating to any pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) is made available to parents and the local authority, as required.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders have designed a curriculum that enables pupils to broaden their knowledge and skills through a wide range of learning opportunities. Careful consideration is given to ensure there is an appropriate balance of different areas such as scientific, technological and creative. Subject-specific curriculum maps provide guidance to teaching staff regarding what content to teach and when. This enables pupils to receive a consistent and well-structured education. Leaders successfully balance their philosophy to provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities, alongside enabling older pupils to be well prepared for entry into their chosen senior schools.
20. The school's extra-curricular programme enables pupils of all ages to extend their talents and interests and spark their curiosity. Activities are wide-ranging and include yoga and meditation, rock band, science, choirs and physical activities such as netball and dance.
21. Pupils across the school make good progress over time. Leaders are ambitious for pupils and ensure that the curriculum is delivered effectively by teachers who understand pupils' needs and plan for their next steps in learning. Pupils often learn at levels above national expectations. For example, pupils in Year 6 articulate hereditary characteristics, the composition of DNA and the structure of chromosomes in science. They discuss discontinuous and continuous variables in mathematics. Teachers know their subject matter well and successfully use a range of strategies to secure pupils' interest and understanding. Lessons are generally well paced and a wide range of resources are used creatively to enhance pupils' learning. For instance, younger pupils learn about mummification in ancient Egypt through role play activities and older pupils use fraction boards to compare portions.
22. Pupils display a positive attitude towards their learning. They are keen to succeed. Pupils approach activities with enthusiasm and readily engage with their teachers. Pupils are adept at reviewing their own progress by responding to focused feedback from their teachers. They recognise how to improve their work and do so successfully. Teachers' on-going assessments are rigorous and parents are kept appropriately informed of their child's progress. Teachers use regular whole-class tests alongside individual pupil assessments to gain a well-rounded view of pupils' learning and achievements. Teachers use this information to check pupils are learning effectively and to identify their next steps.
23. Well-planned activities in the early years support children in their understanding and use of communication and language. In Reception, children blend sounds orally using their knowledge of the sounds letters make. They trace letters and words with their fingers and then pencils to develop their fine motor skills and consolidate their understanding of phonics and word building. Children practise writing letters and combine letters into words. They are supported to build and extend their vocabulary and understanding of language. Teachers carefully select activities that enable children to build their numerical understanding through many counting and matching games. Children develop a clear understanding of two-dimensional shapes and some children confidently recognise more complicated shapes.
24. Teachers' knowledge of each pupil in their care ensures that they provide learning opportunities that do not discriminate against nor limit the achievements of any pupil. There is a clear focus on respect and non-discriminatory behaviours that reflect British values and enable pupils to flourish.

25. The school has robust systems in place to support pupils who have SEND. The school's established procedures enable the early identification of pupils who have additional needs. Leaders put appropriate and targeted support in place and guide teaching staff to use a range of strategies effectively. These include providing pupils with personalised tasks, additional bespoke support from teaching assistants or specialist staff and the use of specific resources to consolidate pupils' learning. Careful monitoring of pupils who have SEND supports both their academic and personal development.

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

26. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

27. Leaders focus on the physical health of pupils through a well-structured curriculum for physical education (PE). Regular timetabled lessons are taught by specialist staff whose expertise and knowledge supports pupils to understand the importance of healthy living. Pupils develop their skills in agility, balance and co-ordination and these are built upon as pupils move through the school. Other physical activities are interwoven into pupils' experiences. These include creative elements such as dance. Teachers make meaningful links across subjects to deepen pupils' learning. For example, pupils experience Caribbean dance and music when studying *Coming to England* by Floella Benjamin. The PE curriculum is also enhanced through a range of team sports such as lacrosse and tag rugby, enabling pupils to compete locally, regionally and nationally. Pupil leaders contribute by setting up and delivering their own dance and cheerleading activities for other pupils.

28. Teachers in the early years carefully plan a range of activities to support children's physical development. These include the development of fine motor skills through activities such as exploring and handling malleable materials. Children's gross motor skills are well supported through outdoor play activities such as balancing, jumping and throwing. Leaders provide additional opportunities for children to understand their bodies through drama and PE lessons. This supports children's understanding of how they can use their physicality to express their thoughts and feelings.

29. The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is well considered. Topics are taught in discrete lessons as well as during form time and assemblies. Pupils in Year 6 are taught about leadership qualities to support them as they prepare for the next stage of their education and lives. They learn about relevant topics that cover all aspects of PSHE. These include online safety, staying safe, the importance of sleep, emotional literacy and celebrating one's own personal identity. Leaders ensure that pupils of all ages, including children in the early years, understand the importance of mental wellbeing. Pupils appreciate that there are people to whom they can talk and share any worries or concerns.

30. The programme for relationships education is effectively integrated into the PSHE curriculum. From the start in the early years, children develop the necessary skills to build positive relationships with one another. Pupils of all ages understand the importance of respect, healthy relationships and celebrating people's differences.

31. Leaders provide many experiences that foster pupils' self-confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem. All pupils in Year 6 take on leadership roles. They apply for such roles and many of these are suggested by pupils themselves in response to aspects of school life that they deem could be better. These roles enable pupils to play their part in sustaining the school's caring, supportive environment. As a result, pupils feel empowered and are proactive in school life. This contributes significantly to pupils feeling valued and being cognisant of their responsibilities within the school community and wider society. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding that assisting others yields mutual benefits. Staff provide each pupil with consistent, personalised support to help them thrive in all aspects of their education. Through this individualised guidance, pupils develop a clear awareness of their strengths, talents and areas for growth. Interactions between pupils and staff are trusting and respectful. Pupils are confident that their views and opinions are heard and appreciated. Consequently, pupils develop a keen sense of self, which equips them very well for the subsequent phases of their educational journey and their adult lives.

32. Leaders encourage pupils to reflect on their own spiritual journeys through their personal faith or by participating in daily school prayers. Pupils recognise that taking time for self-reflection, such as listening to poetry, learning about evolution or considering a weekly thought, helps them to be more connected with their surroundings and supports their wellbeing. Pupils are taught to be confident and stay true to themselves, resisting unnecessary external influences.

33. The school employs effective strategies to promote positive behaviour and to prevent bullying. Leaders and staff implement rewards and sanctions consistently so that pupils understand what is expected of them and the choices they should make. Incidents of poor behaviour and bullying seldom happen and are readily addressed when they do occur to prevent further escalation. There is a calm and purposeful environment around the school during lessons and breaktimes. Pupils understand the importance of making the right decisions around friendships and their interactions. Pupils' positive behaviour is supported through appropriate levels of supervision, particularly during less structured times of the school day such as breaktimes and lunchtimes.

34. Arrangements for health and safety and supervision are well established and consistently applied, ensuring that pupils feel safe and secure throughout the school day. The school premises and grounds are well maintained. Leaders carefully analyse any risks associated with health and safety arrangements. They show vigilance and put in place effective control measures when any risk is identified. Fire procedures are appropriately displayed, regularly practised and well understood by pupils and staff, ensuring calm and safe evacuation when required.

35. Suitable first aid arrangements are in place across the school. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid for staff working in the early years. Medication is administered appropriately and associated records are kept. Pupils who have a specific medical condition or allergies are well supported, including during mealtimes.

36. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance carefully. They identify any attendance concerns and liaise effectively with parents to support pupils and their families as required. The attendance policy and procedures reflect current statutory guidance. An admission register is maintained and leaders inform the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.

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

37. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

38. Leadership opportunities encourage pupils to accept responsibility and contribute positively to the school community. Through the Year 6 leadership programme, pupils undertake appropriate duties, including supporting younger pupils during playtimes. This develops their understanding of the importance of caring for one another and promotes social awareness. Other pupil leader roles that support the school community include pupils helping with sporting activities and caring for the environment through planting and recycling initiatives. Social interactions are further enhanced through initiatives such as celebration circles, which bring pupils of all ages together to share their successes and achievements. This promotes a sense of belonging and builds pupils' self-esteem. Pupils demonstrate genuine pleasure in congratulating others for their accomplishments.

39. Pupils engage thoughtfully in discussions about fairness, sustainability and responsibility. They demonstrate an awareness of how their actions can affect others. Pupils contribute to local and national charitable causes, with pupils often taking initiative through their roles as charity leaders. For example, the whole school recently participated in a 'walkathon' organised by older pupils to raise money for a national sporting charity. At harvest time, pupils in Year 6 organise donations to local foodbanks, enhancing their understanding of how to support people within their local community.

40. The curriculum adheres to the school's ethos that inspires pupils to believe in themselves, persevere and succeed in all that they do. This ethos, alongside the school's values, is well integrated into school life and fully understood and embraced by pupils. This is reflected in pupils' positive attitudes and enthusiasm to be involved and make a difference.

41. Activities across the school support pupils' understanding of respect, empathy and inclusion. Teaching and assemblies reinforce mutual respect and equality. Pupils are taught the importance of having respect for all people. Pupils learn about different types of marriage and partnerships. They understand the challenges that some people may experience around gender identity. This equips pupils to participate responsibly in modern British society. Pupils are taught the importance of British values. They readily recall these, explaining their meaning and relevance to maintain a society where everyone is valued. Teachers include a variety of viewpoints when presenting information to support pupils in making informed choices.

42. The curriculum supports pupils' economic understanding. In PSHE lessons, older pupils learn about budgeting and develop an understanding of financial institutions. Through exploring real-life problems, pupils learn about economic development and strategy. For example, older pupils review the financial status of a series of wind farms to determine which one is least profitable. Pupils are astute around the links between organisations and budgets and how decisions may impact the individuals who work there.

43. Leaders in the early years emphasise the development of children's social skills. Staff model turn-taking, sharing resources and saying please and thank you. Children develop the skills needed for positive interactions and typically demonstrate these when socialising with each other. For instance, the youngest children in the Kindergarten class spontaneously praise one another when playing games together.

44. Leaders actively promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring that cultural differences are taught, understood and celebrated. As a result, pupils see individuality as a positive feature and readily engage in cultural celebrations that may differ from their own. For example, pupils in Year 4 recreate meditation experiences that they learn about when studying Hinduism.

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

45. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

46. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding ensure all staff are suitably trained and understand their responsibilities. Safeguarding leaders undertake a comprehensive training schedule themselves so that they have the skills and knowledge to maintain an effective safeguarding culture with appropriate policies and procedures. Staff training reflects latest statutory guidance. Leaders use a mix of in-person training alongside online modules to ensure all training aspects are covered. This includes the risks to pupils of potential radicalisation and extremism. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The school's code of conduct is understood by staff. Staff know it is important to always be mindful of potential safeguarding risks, particularly when working with pupils in one-to-one situations or when dealing with any aspect of their intimate care.
47. As part of their training, staff learn about the school's whistleblowing arrangements and how to report any low-level concerns they may have about the behaviour of other staff. However, some staff members are not confident regarding the correct terminology to use in each instance.
48. Leaders forge effective links with their safeguarding partners. These include Trafford council's local first response team. School leaders readily seek advice and support from external sources as and when required. They act promptly and in pupils' best interests when any concerns are raised. Detailed records are kept of any safeguarding concerns. These records enable leaders to readily identify any patterns or trends and to act accordingly to support pupils' safety and wellbeing.
49. Leaders create a school culture where pupils' opinions are sought and heard. A mixture of formal mechanisms and informal interactions support pupils to share any worries or concerns that they may have. They know that their trusted adults will respond positively and supportively.
50. An effective filtering and monitoring system is in place to ensure pupils remain safe when using the internet. This is regularly tested and reports are produced to reassure leaders of the effectiveness of the system.
51. Governors have an effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding liaises regularly with safeguarding leaders in the school. Governors understand their safeguarding responsibilities and are suitably trained to carry out their roles in this area. They undertake an annual review of the school's safeguarding arrangements and provide both support and challenge for those with safeguarding responsibilities. This process ensures that safeguarding arrangements are continually reviewed and refined to benefit pupils.
52. There are effective procedures in place to ensure that everyone working in the school, including governors, is suitably checked, as required. All relevant checks are carefully recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR) and associated staff files contain all the necessary supporting documentation.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

53. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

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| School | Bowdon Preparatory School |
| Department for Education number | 358/6000 |
| Registered charity number | 1142325 |
| Address | Bowdon Preparatory School Ashley Road Altrincham Cheshire WA14 2LT |
| Phone number | 0161 928 0678 |
| Email address | head@bowdonprep.org.uk |
| Website | www.bowdonprep.org.uk |
| Proprietor | Bowdon Preparatory School |
| Chair | Mrs Mina Kawasaki |
| Headteacher | Mrs Sara Makepeace-Taylor |
| Age range | 3 to 11 |
| Number of pupils | 230 |
| Date of previous inspection | 15 to 17 November 2022 |

Information about the school

54. Bowdon Preparatory School is a day school for female pupils. The school is located in Altrincham, Cheshire. There is a board of governors who are responsible for governance of the school. The school is a charitable trust and governors also act as trustees. Since the previous inspection, there have been some key changes to the leadership of the school. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2024. A newly appointed chair of governors took up post in September 2025, as did a newly appointed deputy headteacher.
55. There are 31 children in the early years. The school has one Kindergarten class and one Reception class.
56. The school has identified 33 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
57. No pupils in the school are identified as speaking English as an additional language.
58. The school states its aims are to continue to be recognised as a leading prep school, providing unforgettable learning experiences that inspire pupils to believe in themselves and to persevere and succeed in all that they do.

Inspection details

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| Inspection dates | 4 to 6 November 2025 |
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59. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

60. 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

61. 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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For more information, please visit isi.net