

School inspection report

24 to 26 March 2026

St Paul's Cathedral School

2 New Change

London

EC4M 9AD

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. Leaders and governors demonstrate a shared commitment to the school's values, which are evident in the quality of relationships across the community and are reflected consistently in curricular provision. These values underpin a positive and purposeful ethos in which pupils feel supported and develop a substantial sense of belonging. Leaders' thoughtful approach to strategic planning ensures that the school's aims are translated effectively into practice, supported by coherent development planning at whole-school and departmental levels.
2. Governance is effective. Governors maintain a clear understanding of the school's strategic priorities through structured reporting, enabling them to provide appropriate support and challenge. They effectively hold leaders to account for the implementation of agreed priorities, including in relation to safeguarding and risk management, and ensure that decision-making is informed by thorough self-evaluation.
3. Leaders ensure that appropriate policies are made available to parents and that procedures are implemented effectively. Risk management is thorough. Suitable risk assessments are in place, which leaders review regularly.
4. Leaders have established a highly effective chorister programme, underpinned by a nurturing and well-organised boarding provision, which enables pupils to flourish both academically and musically. Choristers participate fully in the school's broad curriculum while performing to a high standard at St Paul's Cathedral. Staff pay careful and sensitive attention to individual pupils' needs. Pupils benefit from a rich and balanced educational experience, within which their musical development is of a high quality. Choristers are fully integrated into all aspects of school life and develop skills, confidence and commitment. This provision represents a significant strength of the school.
5. Leaders provide a broad and balanced curriculum which is suitably planned to meet the ages, interests and needs of pupils. A distinctive quality is the central role that music plays in developing pupils' skills and interests, sense of teamwork and contribution to the school community.
6. Teaching typically supports pupils to develop secure subject knowledge and engage positively with their learning. In the most effective lessons, clear planning and a variety of teaching approaches enable pupils to make good progress and articulate their understanding confidently. Assessment arrangements are well established and used effectively to inform planning. However, teaching does not consistently meet the needs of all pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In some lessons, expectations and levels of challenge are not sufficiently high to maximise pupils' engagement and progress.
7. Leaders ensure that children in the early years benefit from a rich and nurturing environment, supporting effective development from their starting points to meet the early learning goals.
8. Educational visits and residential experiences enhance the curriculum. However, the range of extra-curricular opportunities is limited, restricting pupils' ability to develop a broader range of interests.
9. Leaders place significant emphasis on the development of pupils' personal qualities. Pupils demonstrate high levels of respect for one another and for adults, supported by well-planned personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE)

programmes, which prepares them effectively for life in British society. Behaviour is managed effectively and incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are rare and addressed promptly.

10. From the early years onwards, children and pupils develop their moral awareness and an understanding of right and wrong. Provision in the early years supports children's physical development and wellbeing effectively within a nurturing environment. High-quality boarding accommodation, well-trained staff and carefully structured routines ensure that boarders are well supported and able to balance study, singing, rest and recreation.
11. Leaders and governors ensure that arrangements for pupils' welfare, health and safety are robust and implemented effectively. Systems for supervision and first aid are thorough and records are maintained carefully. Attendance and admission procedures are managed effectively.
12. Provision for careers and financial education supports pupils' understanding of potential future pathways and economic decision-making, complemented by practical experiences and engagement with external speakers and organisations.
13. Pupils develop a secure awareness of society and cultural diversity and a sense of responsibility towards others. Pupils' confidence and resilience are fostered through opportunities to contribute, perform and take part in school life. Boarding provision further enhances pupils' personal development.
14. Leaders ensure that the safeguarding policy reflects current statutory guidance and is implemented effectively.

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 teachers consistently adapt their planning and teaching to meet the needs of all pupils and that expectations and levels of challenge are always sufficiently high to maximise pupils' engagement and progress
- strengthen the extra-curricular opportunities to enhance pupils' skills and knowledge beyond the taught curriculum more broadly.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

15. Leaders and governors share a clear commitment to the school's values of 'love, justice, tolerance, respect, honesty, service and trust', which are reflected in the curriculum and in activities beyond the classroom. These values are manifest in the warm and effective relationships developed between pupils, staff and leaders.
16. Leaders take a thoughtful and reflective approach to strategic planning and safeguarding, with a clear focus on continuous improvement and on ensuring coherence between strategy and practice. Governors maintain clear visibility of strategic priorities through structured reporting and committee work, enabling them to evaluate the impact of leaders' actions and to hold leaders to account. Governors provide effective support and appropriate challenge, ensuring that their oversight of the school's work is informed and thorough. They ensure that leaders apply their knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. As a result, the school meets the Standards and promotes pupils' wellbeing.
17. Leaders adopt a comprehensive approach to self-evaluation and decision-making. Governors determine the strategic direction of the school through clearly defined strategic aims, which leaders work towards through a detailed school development plan. This plan identifies how each priority is to be achieved and is supported by subject and departmental development plans. Staff contribute to this process through regular review, ensuring alignment between whole-school priorities and classroom practice.
18. Leaders ensure that appropriate policies and procedures support the work of the school and that staff understand and implement them effectively. All required policies and a wide range of other information are provided and made available to parents via the school's website and parents receive regular and informative reports about their child's attainment and progress.
19. Leaders have developed a comprehensive programme for the choristers of St Paul's Cathedral through the provision of a highly supportive boarding community which enables pupils to benefit from the full curriculum on offer at the school, as well as rehearse and perform at the highest levels as musicians at the Cathedral. Leaders go to considerable lengths to consider carefully and sensitively the needs of these pupils to ensure their experience of school is not inhibited by their musical roles and that they are fully integrated into school life while developing extremely high levels of skills and experiences. The success of the boarding provision plays a major role in this outcome for pupils, which results in the chorister programme making a considerably positive and transformative impact on pupils' lives.
20. Leaders demonstrate a thorough approach to risk management. Appropriate risk assessments are in place across all aspects of school life, including for individual pupils where necessary. These are reviewed regularly and inform decision-making, contributing to pupils' safety and wellbeing.
21. Leaders communicate effectively with external agencies to support pupils' welfare, including children's services and the police, where necessary. The school informs the local authority whenever pupils leave or join the school at non-standard times of transition.
22. A suitable three-stage complaints procedure is in place and implemented appropriately by form tutors, subject leads and, where appropriate, senior leaders. Governors understand and carry out their duties regarding the manner in which formal complaints are dealt with.

23. Leaders maintain and implement an appropriate accessibility plan, which supports their commitment to inclusion. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

25. Leaders ensure that the curriculum, plans and schemes of work are suitably broad and take appropriate account of the ages, interests and needs of pupils. In the prep school, the curriculum prepares pupils effectively for senior school entry at ages 11 and 13, while covering all required subject areas.
26. A distinctive aspect of the school's provision is the prominence of music for all. Choristers benefit from a well-structured, high-level, specialist programme alongside full access to the wider curriculum. Those who are not choristers are provided with a range of opportunities to develop their musical skills through choirs, ensembles and individual tuition. As a result, pupils develop confidence through regular opportunities to perform both individually and collectively.
27. Teaching typically enables pupils to engage with their learning and to develop subject knowledge securely. In the most effective lessons, clear planning, the use of a range of teaching methods and well-structured activities support pupils' good progress, and pupils articulate their understanding with confidence. However, teachers do not consistently adapt their planning and teaching to meet the needs of all pupils, including those who have SEND. Opportunities for challenge and deeper thinking are variable and, in some lessons, particularly in the pre-prep department, insufficiently high expectations limit pupils' engagement and progress.
28. Leaders ensure that boarders' academic progress is appropriately prioritised alongside the demands of the chorister programme. Boarding routines enable pupils to balance study with appropriate opportunities for rest, which supports their overall academic development.
29. Leaders have established a robust framework for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Assessment information is analysed carefully and used to inform planning so that pupils typically make good progress over time.
30. In the early years, leaders provide a rich and varied curriculum that covers all areas of learning and makes effective use of both indoor and outdoor environments. The curriculum is enhanced through specialist teaching in areas such as dance, music and drama. Warm and supportive relationships between staff and children create a nurturing environment in which children develop knowledge, skills and understanding effectively from their individual starting points.
31. Leaders have implemented a structured approach to identifying and supporting pupils who have SEND. Assessment is used to inform targeted and bespoke support, and pupils and parents contribute their views to help to shape strategies. Staff receive appropriate training; however, adaptive teaching and the consistent evaluation of the impact of interventions are not yet fully embedded.
32. Provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) is supported effectively through the use of appropriate tools to assess pupils' English skills, enabling teachers to adapt learning appropriately within the classroom.
33. Leaders provide extra-curricular activities before and after school, reflecting the demands of the chorister programme and the nature of the school day. However, the current provision is limited and, as a result, opportunities for pupils to develop a broader range of interests and skills beyond the taught curriculum are restricted.

34. Leaders make effective use of the school's location to enrich the curriculum through educational visits to a wide range of cultural and historical sites, including the Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace and the National Army Museum. Residential trips, both within the United Kingdom and overseas, further enhance pupils' learning by providing opportunities for creative, sporting and collaborative experiences.

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

35. All the relevant Standards are met

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

36. Leaders prioritise pupils' personal, social and emotional development. Pupils demonstrate high levels of respect towards one another and to adults and are highly respectful of the views, beliefs and faiths of others. The PSHE programme is well planned and ensures that pupils receive guidance appropriate to their stage of development. As a result, pupils are able to explore and understand elements of mental health and emotional wellbeing and ethical issues, such as those relating to bullying and social diversity. They are well prepared for life in British society. The RSE programme supports pupils' understanding of their physical and emotional changes effectively. Pupils develop an understanding of different family structures, healthy relationships and the importance of concepts such as consent.
37. In the early years, leaders promote children's physical development effectively. Children develop gross motor skills through regular use of outdoor provision, including climbing equipment, bicycles and tricycles, alongside specialist physical education (PE) lessons. Children begin to understand the importance of healthy lifestyles, supported by visits from professionals such as a doctor and a dentist, which enhance their understanding of health, hygiene and oral care. Children develop moral awareness through the curriculum, assemblies and discussions linked to school values. As a result, children gain self-confidence, self-esteem and an understanding of caring and responsible behaviour.
38. Leaders ensure that the curriculum supports pupils' physical development through specialist PE lessons throughout the school. Pupils develop a range of ball skills and learn to control their bodies in increasingly complex physical exercises and sports. Regular fixtures against other schools enable pupils to develop team skills awhile also developing their sense of belonging. Leaders ensure that the musical demands of choristers do not preclude them from partaking in a suitable range of physical activities during the day and in boarding time, such as active play in a local park and opportunities to experience a range of sports such as cricket, badminton, mini golf and trampolining.
39. Leaders promote good behaviour effectively, in line with the school's values, and record any incidents of poor behaviour or bullying. Such incidents are rare. When they occur, leaders respond promptly and appropriately, using proportionate sanctions alongside taking measures to help pupils understand the impact their actions can have on others and how negative consequences can be rectified.
40. Leaders provide a range of opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills and responsibility towards others, including through roles such as head pupils, head choristers and house and sports leaders. High expectations for behaviour are consistently communicated and reinforced by teachers and leaders. Through the curriculum, assemblies, form time and engagement with their local environment, pupils develop a secure understanding of right and wrong and a keen sense of moral awareness. Consequently, pupils are consistently polite, courteous and considerate.
41. Pupils develop confidence through regular opportunities to present and perform. Younger pupils share their ideas willingly in class activities, while older pupils contribute thoughtfully to discussions and participate actively in wider school life. As a result, pupils demonstrate increasing self-assurance and resilience.

42. Leaders promote pupils' spiritual development effectively through a curriculum that encourages reflection, enquiry and an appreciation of different spiritual beliefs and traditions. The theology, philosophy and religion (TPR) programme forms an integral part of pupils' learning, supported by opportunities such as Cathedral-based lessons and visits to places of worship, including a mosque and a synagogue. Pupils deepen their understanding through experiences such as leading tours of the Cathedral and engaging with visitors who share perspectives on religious festivals, alongside regular reflective assemblies and events such as a Diwali puppet performance. Pupils are inquisitive and thoughtful, and staff actively encourage open discussion, enabling pupils to explore ideas with confidence and develop a respectful understanding of diverse faiths and world views.
43. Boarding provision is of high quality. Accommodation is extremely well designed to meet the needs of boarders and is maintained to a high standard. Leaders and governors ensure that boarding arrangements support pupils' welfare effectively. Boarding staff are suitably trained and provide a supportive environment in which pupils can relax, socialise and study. Induction arrangements for new boarders and staff are thorough, including a structured period prior to the start of term that enables pupils to settle quickly and confidently.
44. Staff know boarders well and work collaboratively to provide consistent care. Duty arrangements ensure that appropriate supervision is maintained at all times and that pupils have ready access to adults for support. Boarders speak positively about staff and the relationships they form with them. Through supportive and respectful interactions, staff promote pupils' independence and wellbeing, ensuring that all members of the boarding community thrive.
45. Leaders ensure that arrangements to promote pupils' health, safety and welfare are robust and aligned with current statutory guidance. Policies, procedures and risk assessments, including those relating to fire safety, are comprehensive, regularly reviewed and effectively implemented. Premises and accommodation are well maintained, supported by clear protocols, regular training and prompt responses to any health and safety matters. Regular fire evacuation drills, including during boarding time, ensure that pupils and staff are well prepared.
46. Leaders maintain effective supervision arrangements throughout the school day and when attending rehearsals and services in the Cathedral and in boarding, which are carefully planned, regularly reviewed, and adapted to reflect pupil numbers, activities and timings. Appropriate staff-to-child ratios are maintained in the early years.
47. Suitable arrangements are in place for first aid and the administration of medication, and staff are appropriately trained, including in paediatric first aid in the early years. Records are maintained systematically and reviewed to identify patterns, enabling leaders to take appropriate action to mitigate risk and support pupils' wellbeing. Day pupils and boarders always know to whom they can approach for support.
48. Attendance and admission procedures are effectively managed. Leaders maintain suitable admission and attendance registers. They implement clear systems for monitoring attendance, with defined responsibilities and appropriate oversight, including engagement with governors and external agencies where required. Leaders respond appropriately should there be any concerns about absenteeism.

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

49. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

50. Provision for careers and financial education is well planned and supports pupils' growing awareness of future pathways. Pupils benefit from a dedicated careers week, visiting speakers, including parents and former pupils, and the use of appropriate software to support them in identifying their interests and future options. Children in the early years learn about people who help them and are exposed to the different jobs that adults do.
51. Leaders promote pupils' economic wellbeing effectively through a structured PSHE programme and relevant cross-curricular opportunities. Pupils develop an understanding of financial decision-making, including spending, saving and the responsible use of money, supported by practical experiences such as handling transactions during visits abroad and participating in money-based role play. Older pupils further enhance their understanding through a visit to the Bank of England. Pupils also develop an awareness of economic diversity and the importance of respect for differing levels of wealth.
52. Leaders ensure that pupils understand the wider social context of financial responsibility through charitable initiatives, including the harvest festival, and partnerships with local charitable organisations, such as a local charity for those affected by homelessness, to which pupils contribute food. These experiences deepen pupils' understanding of giving and the needs of others.
53. Pupils develop an understanding of public institutions. For example, children in the early years learn from visits by the police, fire service and members of the NHS, and older pupils visit public institutions to broaden their understanding of how British values play out in the real world.
54. The curriculum supports pupils' social and cultural development effectively. Pupils develop a clear understanding of right and wrong and take responsibility for their behaviour as a result of considering moral issues in assemblies and PSHE lessons. They are provided with opportunities to express their views and to participate in decision-making, including through simple voting activities, effecting changes to the lunch menu and partaking in mock elections for the position of Lord Mayor, which develop their understanding of democracy. Pupils develop an appreciation of different cultures through assemblies and curriculum activities, such as learning about music from diverse traditions.
55. From the early years, children and pupils are encouraged to develop independence and collaborative skills through, for example, organising their own resources and working co-operatively with others.
56. Choristers value being part of a 'community within a community'. The nurturing and close atmosphere of the boarding house and the positive relationships that pupils develop with staff enable them to contribute effectively to the life of the school, the Cathedral and the wider community. Boarders learn to establish a balance between their academic work and chorister commitments, as well as understanding the importance of taking opportunities for rest and recuperation.

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

57. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

58. The school maintains a suitable safeguarding policy which reflects current statutory guidance. This is made available to parents via the school's website.
59. Governors, including those with designated safeguarding responsibilities, provide effective oversight of safeguarding. They receive regular reports, review practice and maintain appropriate levels of scrutiny to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are implemented effectively.
60. The safeguarding team is suitably trained for its roles and ensures that staff receive appropriate safeguarding training, including through an effective induction programme for new staff. As a result, staff are confident in knowing what actions to take when concerns are raised, including those involving concerns or allegations about adults.
61. Leaders keep appropriate records of safeguarding concerns, and the safeguarding team acts swiftly whenever safeguarding concerns arise. Referrals to external agencies, including the local authority, are made appropriately when required.
62. The school implements an effective internet filtering and monitoring system, and leaders report regularly to governors on emerging themes and actions taken. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including when online, and are informed about adults to whom they can go if they have concerns about themselves or others. Staff respond quickly and sensitively to pupils' concerns.
63. Leaders ensure that appropriate safer recruitment checks are carried out on all adults before they commence working with pupils. These checks are recorded systematically in a suitable single central record of appointments (SCR) and reviewed to ensure compliance with statutory requirements.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

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| School | St Paul's Cathedral School |
| Department for Education number | 201/6006 |
| Registered charity number | 312718 |
| Address | St Paul's Cathedral School 2 New Change London EC4M 9AD |
| Phone number | 020 7248 5156 |
| Email address | office@spcs.london.sch.uk |
| Website | www.spcslondon.com |
| Proprietor | The Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral |
| Chair | The Very Revd Andrew Tremlett |
| Headteacher | Mrs Judith Fremont-Barnes |
| Age range | 4 to 13 |
| Number of pupils | 279 |
| Number of boarding pupils | 48 |
| Date of previous inspection | 5 December 2025 |

Information about the school

65. St Paul's Cathedral School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school situated in the City of London. The school educates the Cathedral's choristers, who board at the school. The school is a charitable trust overseen by the trustees and a board of governors. The current chair of governors took up their position in January 2026.
66. Boarders are accommodated in one boarding house which is situated on the school site.
67. There are 22 children in the early years, who are taught in two Reception classes.
68. The school has identified 30 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
69. The school has identified 58 pupils for whom English is an additional language.
70. The school states that its aims are to enable pupils to develop intellectually, socially, personally, physically, culturally and spiritually. It seeks to encourage pupils to love learning, to work to the best of their ability and to strive for excellence in all their endeavours. The school is a Christian community which aims to welcome pupils of all faiths and none. It seeks to prioritise the welfare and independence of each pupil. The school aims to promote the values of love, justice, tolerance, respect, honesty, service and trust and to instil in pupils a sense of mutual responsibility towards others.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

24 to 26 March 2026

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

72. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to the boarding house accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

73. 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