

School inspection report

16 to 18 September 2025

Bridgewater School

Drywood Hall

Worsley Road

Manchester

M28 2WQ

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 consistently prioritise the wellbeing of pupils in all aspects of their planning and decision making. Leaders implement well-balanced development plans for continuous improvement. These plans are informed by a rigorous process of self-evaluation in which leaders place high value on the views and opinions of pupils, parents and staff.
2. Governors have a comprehensive oversight of the work of school leaders. They know the school's strengths and areas for development. They effectively monitor the school through regular reports, frequent visits and ongoing dialogue with leaders. Governors consistently ensure that leaders have the knowledge and skills to carry out their roles effectively.
3. Leaders actively promote the emotional wellbeing of pupils through a well-established system of pastoral care which supports pupils on an individual basis. Across all ages, leaders and staff have a detailed understanding of the needs of their pupils, enabling appropriate support to be put into place when required.
4. The curriculum is age-appropriate and regularly reviewed by leaders. Leaders monitor pupils' progress and ensure that, when required, suitable support is put in place for individual pupils. Across the school, pupils achieve well, including the oldest pupils in Years 11 and 13. The majority of teaching is well planned and incorporates opportunities to enable pupils to develop their own ideas. However, some teaching does not challenge and extend pupils' thinking and application of their learning. When this occurs, pupils do not learn as well as they should.
5. The early years curriculum and the safe learning environment support the needs and interests of the children. Children, over time, gain increasing independence and self-awareness through different learning opportunities in the classroom and in the school's woodland teaching area. Their foundational knowledge in communication, speaking, reading, writing and mathematics is well developed by skilled staff. The youngest children learn effectively and are well prepared to transition into Year 1.
6. Pupils are well prepared to be citizens in British society. The careers programme prepares pupils for making decisions about their future. Pupils develop a clear understanding of their social responsibilities through activities such as supporting younger pupils as mentors as well as volunteering in the local community. The school develops pupils' understanding of everyday financial matters, as well as understanding the importance of taking responsibility for looking after their own mental and physical health.
7. Leaders prioritise the safeguarding, safety and wellbeing of pupils. Staff are well trained in their safeguarding responsibilities. Concerns are acted upon in a timely and appropriate manner. The school liaises effectively with local safeguarding partners. Safer recruitment procedures are followed meticulously to ensure the suitability of all employees and governors. There is a comprehensive and well-managed approach to all aspects of health and safety at the school including fire safety and first aid procedures. Leaders and staff identify and mitigate any potential risks 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 plan lessons that appropriately identify and challenge pupils to develop their thinking and apply their learning in more complex ways, when they are ready to do so.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders have a clear vision for the school which is driven by their overriding ambition for pupils to flourish and achieve to the best of their abilities. Leaders ensure that staff effectively implement policies and procedures which prioritise pupil wellbeing. Listening is embedded into the leadership culture. This ensures that the views of pupils have a positive influence on the development of the school, such as the growth in clubs and activities led by pupils.
9. Leaders take a rigorous approach to self-evaluating the development of the school's provision. Staff, parents and pupils are regularly consulted, and their views inform well-structured annual development plans. These plans are documents which are constantly monitored by leaders to ensure positive outcomes for pupils, such as the improvement in academic attainment over the last two years.
10. Governors ensure that leaders have the relevant skills to carry out their roles and ensure that the requirements of the Standards are consistently met. Governors visit the school frequently to scrutinise records, meet with staff and observe school activities. The governing board receive termly reports of all aspects of school life, including evaluations of the annual development plans, enabling them to have effective oversight of the school.
11. In the early years, leaders are well trained in their roles. The well-planned and delivered curriculum supports children's readiness for Year 1. Staff in the early years are supported through regular dialogue about their professional practice and training needs. The school's safeguarding, health and safety, supervision, first aid and risk assessment policies are implemented effectively in the early years setting to ensure the wellbeing of children.
12. Leaders maintain effective oversight of teaching throughout the school. They regularly conduct tours of lessons, review pupils' work and talk to pupils about their learning. This, together with pupil progress data, allows leaders to evaluate how effectively the school is delivering its teaching and learning aims. A well-planned programme of weekly professional development allows teachers to reflect on their work and develop their strategies to enhance pupils' achievement.
13. Leaders have a clear understanding of how to mitigate any potential harm to pupils' wellbeing and are proactive in identifying potential risks. The school's extensive risk register identifies current and potential contextual risks and leaders and governors review these risks on an ongoing basis. Staff are well trained and produce suitable risk assessments that identify and manage potential risks to pupils, including school trips, activities, premises and transport.
14. The school's value of inclusivity is integral to all aspects of the school's provision. Leaders ensure that there is equality of opportunity for pupils. An appropriate accessibility plan is in place. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.
15. Leaders communicate effectively with a range of external agencies such as children's services and other safeguarding partners. Leaders work appropriately with local authorities with regard to any pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) and report on all aspects of funding and finance. Leaders also ensure that they inform the local authority of any pupils who arrive or leave at non-standard transition points.

16. Leaders effectively manage any parental concerns or complaints that the school receives. They maintain clear records of complaints and action taken by the school in response to these. Leaders respond to complaints within the time frames stated in the school's policy.
17. The school regularly provides parents, including those of children in the early years, with reports on the progress of their own child throughout the school year. Other required information such as policies and required contact details are provided on the school website or otherwise made available to parents and other agencies.

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. The curriculum is well planned and regularly reviewed by leaders to ensure that it meets the needs of pupils. Using the national curriculum, leaders ensure that the age-appropriate curriculum consistently challenges pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding, and enhance their scientific, mathematical and literary skills. Effective curriculum planning supports pupils to transfer skills and knowledge from one subject area to another with confidence. For instance, pupils use their numeracy and creative skills in science projects when designing a human settlement on Mars.
20. In recent years, leaders have prioritised the development of pupils' technological, speaking and listening skills. Pupils increasingly using online resources to support their own independent writing across subjects. There are wide-ranging opportunities for pupils to develop and enhance their communication skills through debate, engaging in class discussions and expressing their own ideas articulately, including when leading assemblies.
21. Leaders in the early years provide opportunities for children to learn through play and exploration of the world around them. The well-planned curriculum enables children to develop their understanding of number, spatial awareness, agility, fine motor skills and the wider world. The phonics curriculum enables children to make good progress in acquiring early reading and writing skills. The focus staff give to communication and language supports children to express themselves confidently using a range of age-appropriate vocabulary.
22. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the subjects they teach. Many teachers encourage pupils to develop their own ideas and to think for themselves. This is very evident in subjects such as English and geography where teachers have a detailed understanding of what pupils know and can do, enabling them to extend pupils' understanding effectively. However, in some lessons there is inconsistency in the level of academic challenge, and this limits pupils' ability to think for themselves and apply their learning in more complex ways.
23. Leaders use the performance information to check the progress that pupils are making. Leaders identify and take appropriate decisions and action to support individual pupils. Assessments enable pupils to have a clear understanding of how well they are progressing, and they are motivated by regular guidance and feedback from their teachers. Overall, pupils learn effectively and achieve well, including at transition points such as the end of early years, the end of Year 6, GCSE and at A level. They are well ready to move onto the next stage of their learning. Older pupils achieve well across a range of qualifications. They move onto highly appropriate next step destinations in employment, training or education.
24. The school effectively identifies the learning and developmental requirements of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers use a range of teaching strategies to support pupils, such as appropriate questioning and structured worksheets. Additional small group or one-to-one intervention provides appropriate short-term support outside lessons, when required. Consequently, pupils who have SEND learn well alongside their peers.
25. Currently, there are a small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) who are in the early stages of learning English. Staff are well trained to use a range of resources and techniques to support pupils to access the learning in the classroom. As a result, pupils learn, access the curriculum and make good progress over time.

26. Leaders have established a wide ranging extra-curricular programme which provides considerable challenge and motivation for pupils, so that they extend their skills and achievements. There is a very high level of participation of pupils in activities ranging from debating to yoga. These activities are complemented by opportunities for music, sport, drama and outdoor education. Older pupils are also challenged by taking part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Taking part in this programme has a positive impact on pupils' social and leadership skills as well as their self-confidence.

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

27. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

28. The school actively promotes pupils' confidence and self-esteem through providing extensive opportunities to support their emotional wellbeing. Well-trained staff know pupils well. Staff understand the needs of their pupils and how to support them. Leaders are proactive in identifying and supporting potentially vulnerable pupils who have specific welfare needs. When needed, pupils have access to quiet spaces, known as the 'den' and sensory rooms. Every week, on 'Wellbeing Fridays', pupils have dedicated time to focus on their feelings and emotions.
29. As a result of a well-planned curriculum, pupils' understanding of morality, respect and those with different beliefs, lifestyles and faiths develops. For instance, through religious studies (RS) lessons, pupils discuss issues such as the morality of genetic editing and eugenics. In history, pupils debate whether the British Empire was a source of good or evil. Pupils learn about different faiths, as well as gaining an understanding of their own spirituality, through their study of RS, art and literature. Assemblies provide further opportunities to listen to other pupils talking about their own beliefs and faiths and the effect on their lives.
30. Leaders have established an extensive age-appropriate programme for personal, social, health, citizenship and economic (PSHCE) education which incorporates relationships and sex education (RSE). Pupils learn about themes such as different types of relationships, the importance of consent, dealing with extremism and developing a healthy lifestyle. Teachers are trained effectively and adapt their lessons to react to world and local events. Leaders review and amend the PSHE programme in response to feedback from pupils and parents.
31. The well-planned physical education (PE) and games programme facilitates the growth of pupils' understanding of the role that physical fitness plays in healthy living. Pupils make good progress, from a young age, in developing a range of skills which equip them for individual and team sports such as football, netball and badminton. At the same time, pupils develop their mental resilience through physical activities which has a positive effect on their mental health.
32. Staff help the youngest children to recognise the importance of playing and learning together. In specialist PE lessons, children make rapid progress in developing gross and fine motor skills which enhance their coordination. Staff successfully encourage children to listen to each other, work together to solve problems and to share in the success of their peers. Consequently, children behave well in the early years setting and are kind and caring to each other.
33. Leaders implement clear and appropriate policies for behaviour and anti-bullying. Leaders and staff respond swiftly to any concerns or allegations. Pupils' personalised record of their rewards and sanctions are constantly reviewed by leaders who act to support individual pupils. Sanctions are focused on learning lessons and making amends, which reflect a supportive and positive culture. Leaders also use a range of information to identify trends and patterns in pupils' behaviours, and where they can support pupils further.
34. Many pupils take on positions of responsibility. For instance, in the prep school pupils are elected as ambassadors to represent their class at weekly meetings known as 'the cabinet'. Year 6 pupils take on the responsibility of being mentors for younger pupils. In the senior school some pupils become members of the student leadership team, house captains or lead activity clubs.

35. Health and safety policies and procedures are comprehensive and implemented effectively, including that related to fire risk. The school site is secure and well maintained to ensure a suitable environment in which pupils can learn, play and socialise. Pupils are supervised effectively, including in the early years. First aid provision is appropriate and effective, including staff training, medical facilities and record keeping.
36. The school's attendance and admission registers are accurately maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders inform the local authority of any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition points or where there are concerns about their attendance.

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. The school community is characterised by mutual respect and an inherent understanding that everyone is treated as a unique individual. From an early age, pupils develop an understanding of the importance of listening to others and about different perspectives to their own. Pupils are regularly given rewards when they display the school's values in their actions. As members of one of three mixed age houses, pupils are taught about the importance of respect and care for each other. Teachers, through the curriculum, consistently reinforce the importance of mutual respect through, for example, learning about healthy relationships and being a responsible citizen.
39. Fundamental values such as equality, democracy and the rule of law are interwoven into the school curriculum. The school teaches pupils about the importance of individual liberty through topics such as the suffragettes, the abolition of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Leaders ensure that the voices of pupils are heard through elected school councils. Concepts such as democracy are further reinforced in subjects like history, in which pupils are taught about the growth of parliament. Pupils distinguish right from wrong and take responsibility for their actions and the role of important public services, such as the police.
40. Pupils gain an understanding of different cultural and social perspectives of the world through assemblies, PSHE, subjects such as geography and history and pupil enrichment days. This is typified by the recent cultural day, organised by the pupil 'respect, equality and diversity (RED)' ambassadors, which enabled pupils, across both the senior and prep school, to increase their understanding of cultures from Africa, Europe and Asia.
41. The school's comprehensive PSHE programme teaches pupils how money works in society and consequently their economic competence grows rapidly. In the prep school, pupils learn about taxes and earning money, while their older peers are challenged by monetary concepts such as debt, credit and mortgages. Practical applications of understanding how money works are used by the youngest children when shopping on a budget in the local supermarket, while older pupils make decisions how to most effectively use their allocated funds for the Year 11 prom.
42. Through play and a comprehensive programme of activities, children in the early years develop socially and increasingly accept responsibility when they make mistakes. The children support each other when, for example, celebrating their peers' birthdays by collaboratively making a birthday cake out of plasticine. The children begin to understand the importance of rules, democracy and turn-taking through actions such as voting for their preferred end of the day story.
43. Over the last three years, leaders have developed more opportunities for pupils to enhance their sense of social responsibility. In the prep school, leaders have introduced the 'lions award' scheme which focuses on pupils engaging in activities outside the school. Older pupils have the 'Bridgewater Passport' which focuses on five strands of enrichment activities including their social responsibility and leadership. Consequently, more pupils volunteer in the local community including organising coffee mornings, litter picking and working in a local country park.
44. The school provides an age-appropriate programme of careers education which is regularly assessed against national benchmarks. Pupils are taught about skills needed for employment, consequences of subject choices for future pathways and how to write job applications. Pupils complete work

experience placements in both Year 10 and 12, which are in line with their abilities, interests and aspirations. Older pupils benefit from bespoke guidance in making decisions about post-18 courses. The careers programme prepares pupils well for the next stages of their education, training and employment.

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 have embedded a school culture in which the highest priority is given to safeguarding pupils. This is informed by a clear and appropriate safeguarding policy and procedures which are in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders ensure that the policy is implemented effectively in all parts of the school, including the early years setting.
47. Members of the school's safeguarding team are appropriately trained for their roles in line with local procedures. They liaise effectively with external agencies for training, seeking advice when needed and making referrals to the relevant authorities when appropriate.
48. The safeguarding team responds to safeguarding concerns promptly and effectively. Weekly meetings between safeguarding and pastoral teams ensure that, when required, pupils receive precise and timely support. Safeguarding concerns are suitably recorded showing actions taken and decisions made. Child protection records are maintained appropriately.
49. Governors maintain an effective oversight of the school's implementation of the safeguarding policy. A designated governor takes responsibility for overseeing the work of the safeguarding team and visits the school regularly, reviewing a range of information related to leaders' work. The governors formally review the safeguarding policy and other supporting information routinely.
50. Staff are trained effectively and regularly in safeguarding procedures, including scenario-based problems and online quizzes to review understanding. There is also a suitable safeguarding induction programme for those new to the school. Therefore, staff have a detailed understanding of safeguarding procedures and how to escalate concerns about pupils. Staff are aware of the procedures to follow should there be any concerns about, or allegations against, adults working at the school.
51. Staff know the pupils well and are able to identify changes of behaviour or signs that could possibly indicate a concern. Pupils know how to access adult support to share any concerns or worries that they may have. As a consequence, pupils feel well looked after and safe in the school community.
52. The school teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Pupils develop a clear understanding of what constitutes inappropriate online behaviour including the dangers posed by social media misinformation. Suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place and the system is thoroughly tested on a termly basis. The safeguarding team responds quickly when there are alerts regarding possible inappropriate use of the internet.
53. The school carries out all required pre-employment checks in a timely manner for adults who work with pupils, including children in the early years. This includes for supply staff, governors and volunteers who are working in the same environment. A suitable central record of appointments is in place and staff files include the information required by current statutory guidance.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Bridgewater School
Department for Education number	355/6005
Registered charity number	1105547
Address	Bridgewater School Drywood Hall Worsley Road Manchester Greater Manchester M28 2WQ
Phone number	0161 7941463
Email address	admin@bwslive.co.uk
Website	www.bridgewater-school.co.uk
Proprietor	Bridgewater School
Chair	Mrs Kathryn Mort
Headteacher	Mrs Judy Nairn
Age range	3 to 18
Number of pupils	434
Date of previous inspection	26 to 29 April 2022

Information about the school

55. Bridgewater School is an independent co-educational day school located seven miles from the centre of Manchester. The school consists of a prep school and a senior school which includes a sixth form. The whole school operates on the same campus. The school is a registered charity overseen by directors who also take on roles as governors. The current chair of governors took up her post in September 2022 although has been a director since 2013.
56. There are 30 children in the early years setting, comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
57. The school has identified 116 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
58. The school has identified English as an additional language for 47 pupils.
59. The school states its aims are to deliver holistic learning through a range of opportunities which allow pupils to flourish to the best of their academic, social, physical, emotional and practical abilities. Through the school's core values of inclusivity, intellect, integrity and inspiration, the school aims to celebrate each individual, their talents and their contribution to society.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

16 to 18 September 2025

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

61. 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 of 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.

62. 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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