

School inspection report

27 to 29 January 2026

Sherborne School

Abbey Road

Sherborne

Dorset

DT9 3LF

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 work well with governors to provide highly effective evaluation and strategic direction. Together, they share a vision to continue to develop and improve the school. Leaders promote a supportive and inclusive school community that aligns with the school's aims. As a result, the Standards are met consistently well.
2. Leaders review and implement school policies effectively and competently. They provide parents with a clearly written complaints procedure and manage any submitted complaints appropriately.
3. Leaders implement a broad and ambitious curriculum. Most lessons are planned well and delivered effectively. Pupils typically demonstrate responsible attitudes towards their work and are successful in making consistently good progress. However, in a few lessons, planning and teaching does not fully engage the interests of pupils. This means that, in these lessons, pupils do not extend their knowledge and understanding as well as they could.
4. Leaders and staff actively promote pupils' wellbeing. Pupils demonstrate respectful attitudes towards their teachers and each other. Throughout the school, pupils behave consistently well and build supportive, friendly relationships.
5. Leaders have established a coherent and integrated boarding community that reflects an extremely careful understanding of boarders' individual needs. This is a significant strength of the school. The boarding leadership structure places safeguarding and pastoral care at the centre of boarders' daily experiences. Leaders ensure boarders are provided with individualised support that prioritises their wellbeing. Boarders are provided with consistently thorough, proactive and responsive pastoral care that promotes an inclusive, respectful and harmonious boarding environment. As a result, boarders thrive and develop confidence and independence in a boarding community that values collaboration and personal identity.
6. The school provides pupils with a range of well-planned opportunities to support their personal development. Pupils participate in a broad programme of extra-curricular and physical education (PE) activities. Leaders implement thorough personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculums. Pupils understand the importance of taking responsible decisions that promote their physical and mental health.
7. Leaders implement a structured careers programme. Pupils are provided with clear and impartial guidance that enables them to make informed and ambitious decisions about future opportunities and pathways.
8. Leaders promote a highly effective and robust safeguarding culture. Safer recruitment procedures are secure and managed in line with current statutory guidance. Staff demonstrate a confident and thorough understanding of the school's safeguarding practices and procedures.

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 teaching consistently engages and challenges pupils so that they extend their learning and enhance their progress.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders and governors work together effectively to provide clear strategic direction. Leaders take suitable actions as a result of effective evaluation and thorough oversight. They identify areas to develop collaboratively, including by consulting regularly with pupils, staff and parents. Governors are proactive and well informed. They visit regularly, tour boarding houses and meet with pupils and staff. Policies are detailed, regularly reviewed and implemented effectively. Governors provide robust challenge and support so that the Standards are met consistently.
10. Leaders are approachable and visible throughout the school. They visit lessons and the boarding community so that they know and understand the school well. Leaders consult with staff and implement measures that further improve the school's provision. For example, leaders introduced a revised classroom code of conduct so that pupils approach their lessons in a more consistent and diligent manner.
11. Leaders' strategic plan supports the school's aims and prioritises pupils' wellbeing. Leaders promote a supportive community in which pupils feel valued and develop resilience and confidence. As a result, pupils set themselves ambitious goals, develop a secure understanding of moral responsibility and achieve well academically.
12. Boarding leaders are appropriately trained and they promote an inclusive environment. Boarders' wellbeing is central to decision-making, supported by systematic monitoring, pastoral meetings and detailed record-keeping. Induction and guardianship arrangements are carefully managed, and boarders' views are valued. Boarding provision is led well and meets the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (NMS).
13. Leaders provide parents with the required information, primarily through the school website. Parents receive detailed written reports and attend regular parents' meetings. The school consults appropriately with the local authority about the financial arrangements for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
14. Leaders implement a suitable complaints procedure with clear timescales and a three-stage process. Concerns are handled promptly and courteously. Formal complaints are managed in line with the policy. Leaders maintain suitable records, including any action taken and resolutions reached.
15. The school's approach to risk management is thorough and effective. Comprehensive risk assessments covering the premises, supervision and off-site activities are reviewed regularly. Staff are provided with effective training so that they produce consistent and suitable risk assessments. Leaders and governors provide ongoing and thorough oversight of the school's competent approach to managing risk.
16. Leaders maintain constructive links with safeguarding partners and external agencies. They consult with local safeguarding partners and follow external safeguarding advice, when required. The school appropriately notifies the local authority when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition points. Boarding staff attend appropriate external training opportunities so that their knowledge and understanding of boarding requirements continues to develop. The school arranges for external counsellors to visit the school to provide pupils with further support, if needed.

17. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and implement an appropriate accessibility plan to improve access to the environment and curriculum. Pupils are assessed when they join the school so that staff have a clear and thorough understanding of how to meet their individual pastoral and academic needs. For example, leaders amend the timetable and reorganise classrooms, if 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 implement a broad curriculum that meets pupils' individual needs. Pupils study a wide range of academic, creative and technical subjects. They are provided with opportunities to extend their research skills, think critically and work independently by undertaking the Higher Project Qualification (HPQ) and the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). The curriculum is carefully planned so that pupils build securely on prior learning and read widely across subjects. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well in their GCSE, BTEC and A-level examinations.
20. Senior leaders oversee the curriculum through lesson observations, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work. A clear classroom code of conduct secures calm and purposeful learning. In lessons, pupils engage in structured debates on topics such as consent and civic responsibility, thoughtfully considering contrasting viewpoints and articulating reasoned arguments. Teaching promotes respect for democratic principles, individual liberty and the rule of law through balanced discussion and careful examination of evidence.
21. Teaching is typically effective. Teachers build on prior knowledge and use targeted questioning to extend thinking. In mathematics, for instance, pupils explain and justify each stage of solving problems involving two unknown numbers before setting out their working clearly. In science, pupils investigate how water moves into and out of plant cells by placing potato samples in different salt solutions. They measure changes carefully, evaluate the reliability of their results and link their findings to examination-style questions. As a result of such lessons, pupils show consistent interest in their work, widen their knowledge and understanding and, typically, make good progress.
22. Teachers routinely provide varied opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and skills. In drama, pupils devise performances exploring themes such as conflict and power, refining staging and movement collaboratively. In creative and digital media lessons, pupils produce short film sequences using editing software to apply framing and sound techniques. In sixth-form history of art, pupils analyse unseen works using precise vocabulary to compare artists such as Valadon and Manet. The best and most effective teaching equips pupils to consistently broaden and deepen their understanding. However, in a few lessons, teaching is less effective and engaging, so pupils' progress is not enhanced as much as it could be.
23. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive structured support. All pupils are assessed carefully when they join the school and referred, if appropriate, to the leaders with responsibility for SEND. Individual needs are shared with staff through the school's information system to ensure consistent classroom adjustments are implemented. Leaders monitor progress carefully so that support continues to match pupils' individual needs and requirements. Pupils who have SEND are supported well and make good progress.
24. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are provided with the help that they need. Leaders support pupils' academic writing and help them to acquire and understand new subject vocabulary. Teachers reinforce key terminology in lessons, and additional tuition is provided where appropriate. Leaders monitor and track the progress of pupils who speak EAL and adjust the support they receive in response. Pupils who speak EAL develop a secure and confident use of written and spoken English during their time at the school.

25. Leaders implement a thorough assessment framework. Assessment information is used effectively to monitor and promote individual progress. Regular assessment, including weekly online tests in subjects such as business and economics, reinforces understanding and supports examination preparation. Leaders analyse outcomes and provide targeted support, including subject clinics and extension opportunities, such as the 'thinkers group', for pupils with higher prior attainment. Staff provide pupils with regular feedback on their work so that they understand what they do well, and the steps they need to take to improve.
26. The extensive extra-curricular programme enables pupils to broaden their skills and interests. Pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE), develop leadership skills and undertake service that broadens their understanding of social responsibility. Activities such as chess provide opportunities for pupils to develop their strategic and critical thinking. Pupils participate in a range of sports and physical activity clubs that offer options to improve skills in traditional and alternative sports such as water polo. Drama productions and music ensembles provide pupils with well-planned performance opportunities that build their confidence and self-esteem.
27. Boarding provides structured routines that support academic focus and wellbeing. Boarders study in an orderly environment and participate in evening and weekend activities and excursions that promote friendship and enrichment. A suitable balance of organised study, activity and personal time supports independence and community life.

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

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

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

29. Relationships between pupils and teachers are characterised by mutual respect. Leaders establish clear expectations through a consistently implemented behaviour policy across academic and boarding settings. Positive conduct is reinforced through the award of house points and recognition of kind behaviour and actions in assemblies. Staff model respectful interactions and address concerns promptly. Consequently, behaviour in lessons and around the site is calm, responsible and inclusive.
30. Leaders implement an effective anti-bullying strategy underpinned by careful monitoring. Leaders teach effective PSHE lessons and deliver thoughtful assemblies that explore the consequences of discriminatory language and support pupils' understanding of using the internet responsibly and acting respectfully. As a result, incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils express confidence that any bullying incidents would be dealt with swiftly and effectively when reported.
31. The RSE programme is age appropriate and well structured. Pupils learn about consent, healthy relationships and maintaining appropriate boundaries through their PSHE lessons, tutor discussions and assemblies. Parents are consulted before pupils are taught sensitive topics. Pupils demonstrate maturity and respect in their interactions with others.
32. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is planned well. Pupils attend chapel where they reflect and develop a secure understanding of moral responsibility. In English lessons, pupils debate moral issues such as the use of power, considering contrasting viewpoints thoughtfully. In PSHE and religious studies (RS) lessons, pupils explore civic responsibility and understand the rights of individuals to follow different religions and beliefs.
33. Leaders implement a well-planned and relevant PSHE curriculum. They consult with pupils so that lessons reflect their needs and remain engaging. Pupils learn how to manage their emotions and develop strategies to help with challenging situations. They explore the dangers of alcohol and drug misuse. Pupils develop a secure understanding of the importance of taking responsible decisions that promote their positive mental and physical health.
34. Leaders provide a wide-ranging sports and PE programme. This includes opportunities to take part in team and individual sports, to join the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and to participate in the DofE scheme. Competitive sports fixtures and tournaments allow pupils to develop their skills and promote working together as a team. In PE lessons, pupils learn about fitness, training methods and develop an understanding of how exercise positively affects the body. Sporting values, such as discipline, perseverance and respect for the opposition, are reinforced consistently. These approaches enable pupils to engage in physical activity and recognise how it positively contributes to their physical and mental wellbeing.
35. Leaders provide an inclusive and stimulating boarding experience that is central to pupils' personal development and wellbeing. Boarding staff develop a deeply embedded culture of pastoral care, belonging and security throughout the boarding houses. Boarders are confident and reflective and demonstrate a thorough sense of personal identity. They contribute positively to the school and wider community, for example by visiting local primary schools and residential homes for the

elderly. Leaders ensure that pupils who do not board are carefully and inclusively integrated into the school's house structure.

36. Leaders monitor and promote boarders' wellbeing consistently. Boarding accommodation is clean, comfortable and well maintained. Boarders are provided with appropriate storage for their personal belongings. Boarding leaders implement an effective and thorough induction routine so that new boarders are welcomed and settle in quickly. The school manages laundry arrangements appropriately for boarders' uniform and personal clothing. Boarders are provided with balanced and healthy food options, as well as a range of snacks outside mealtimes.
37. Health and safety arrangements are systematic and regularly overseen. A suitable number of staff are trained as fire wardens. Evacuation routes are clearly marked and regularly rehearsed so that pupils know how to leave buildings in case of an emergency. Leaders implement a lockdown procedure that pupils understand well. Leaders carry out site maintenance and ensure that equipment is serviced appropriately. They respond promptly when health and safety issues are reported and maintain detailed records of the actions they take. These measures mean that the premises and accommodation remain suitable and secure for pupils.
38. Leaders provide pupils with appropriate first aid and medical facilities. A suitable number of staff undertake first aid training. Leaders respond promptly and compassionately to boarders' medical needs, when required. The administration of first aid and medication is managed competently.
39. Supervision is consistent and well organised during the school day and in boarding. Staff are visible around the school so that pupils know whom to approach for support. In boarding, published duty rotas ensure pupils know which staff are on duty each evening and overnight.
40. Admission and attendance registers are kept in accordance with current statutory guidance. Attendance records are maintained digitally, as required. Leaders consult appropriately with the local authority about any concerning patterns of attendance. Leaders analyse attendance data carefully and take effective action to promote high levels of pupils' attendance.

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

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

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

42. The curriculum provides well-planned opportunities for pupils to explore respect, inclusion and tolerance. Lessons engage pupils in discussions about cultural traditions, ethical issues and contemporary debates, enabling them to consider differing viewpoints thoughtfully. Through exploration of themes such as consent, power and civic responsibility, pupils develop an understanding of individual rights, accountability and shared responsibility within society. These discussions encourage pupils to apply academic learning to contemporary social contexts and to reflect critically on their own values. As a result, pupils develop mature, balanced perspectives and are prepared to contribute positively to British and global society.
43. Pupils benefit from a structured and carefully monitored careers programme led by knowledgeable leaders. Leaders provide pupils with balanced and impartial guidance and advice. External professionals visit the school to inform pupils about their careers and the work that they do. Leaders arrange a careers fair for sixth-form pupils. This provides appropriate opportunities for them to engage directly with employers and former pupils and to develop a broader understanding of future career opportunities. These varied opportunities provide pupils with relevant information about university choices, immediate employment and apprenticeship courses.
44. Pupils contribute actively to the local and wider community. They support local primary schools and engage with care homes and hospitals through house and school initiatives. Musical groups perform in public concerts which build positive links with the local community. Pupils lead and participate in charitable fundraising, including events such as a 400-kilometre sponsored run. They undertake structured volunteering through their participation in the DofE scheme. Pupils demonstrate initiative and collective responsibility by collaboratively selecting which charities to support. They develop empathy and social awareness, and an understanding that serving others is kind and inclusive.
45. Pupils acquire a secure understanding of money and finance. Younger pupils learn about budgeting, advertising and consumer spending. Older pupils explore investment, savings, credit, loans and interest. Sixth-form pupils study student finance, salaries, taxation and digital finance. As a result, pupils acquire a practical and relevant understanding of how to manage personal finances in adult life.
46. Senior pupils are encouraged to hold positions of responsibility and to act as mentors for younger pupils. Prefects, including those with wellbeing and equality responsibilities, receive training so that they support younger pupils effectively. Prefects demonstrate responsibility and kindness and act as positive role models around the school. Older pupils help their younger peers to manage academic demands and resolve difficulties constructively.
47. Pupils develop an informed understanding of law, order and moral responsibility. Through structured debate in English and language lessons, pupils explore ethical issues such as the responsible use of power and consider contrasting viewpoints. PSHE lessons reinforce pupils' understanding of civic responsibility. Pupils learn to evaluate consequences, respect alternative perspectives and articulate reasoned arguments.
48. The curriculum provides impartial guidance on political and civic systems. In PSHE lessons, pupils examine how public institutions operate and how government revenue is raised and allocated. They

develop an understanding of the relationship between citizens and the state. Classroom discussions help pupils to distinguish between opinion and fact and to analyse contrasting political perspectives. Consideration of national and global issues helps pupils to acquire informed and measured views about democratic participation and civic life.

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

49. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

50. Leaders promote a robust and effective safeguarding culture throughout the school. The safeguarding policy is clearly written, reviewed regularly and reflects current statutory guidance. Governors provide thorough oversight of the school's safeguarding procedures, including meetings with the safeguarding team, scrutiny of safeguarding reports and checks of the single central record of appointments (SCR).
51. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are trained appropriately for their role. They consult with local safeguarding partners and refer concerns to them, when required. The safeguarding team meet regularly to discuss any concerns and take appropriate action in response. They maintain suitable and thorough safeguarding records.
52. Leaders' regular engagement with local authority training means that they develop experience and a thorough understanding of the safeguarding requirements informed by current statutory guidance. Leaders share safeguarding information with staff promptly and appropriately. They review safeguarding thresholds carefully and disseminate relevant information effectively to tutors and boarding staff so that pupils' individual needs continue to be supported well.
53. Staff receive comprehensive safeguarding training, including at induction. Leaders supplement annual safeguarding training with regular bulletins that provide staff with safeguarding scenarios and updated guidance. Staff complete safeguarding quizzes that reinforce their understanding of how to respond to, and report, any safeguarding concerns. Training includes the latest updates on the 'Prevent' duty so that staff remain alert to the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
54. Leaders provide pupils with a range of suitable mechanisms to seek support. Pupils understand the importance of requesting help and know what to do, if required. Pupils know that they can approach any member of staff. Staff meet with pupils regularly in house and school council meetings so that pupils can raise any concerns they may have. Pupils can submit a digital form, which is directed to senior staff if they prefer to seek help and guidance privately. Through such measures, pupils' wellbeing is supported and promoted consistently.
55. Boarding leaders provide boarders with careful and effective support. They consult closely with educational guardians to ensure clear understanding of the school's high expectations to actively promote boarders' wellbeing. Boarders have access to a suitable independent person, and know how to make contact, if required.
56. Pupils learn how to take responsible decisions that promote their personal safety, including when online. They are taught how to be digitally responsible in well-planned computing and PSHE lessons and through participating in digital awareness days. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate the authenticity of online information critically and to explore its potential to misinform. Leaders implement a robust internet monitoring and filtering system. Alerts, sent directly to the senior staff, are investigated appropriately. Leaders keep thorough records relating to any suspicious online activity and analyse these to identify any patterns or trends.
57. The school's safer recruitment arrangements are robust. Leaders carry out all required checks in advance of adults beginning work at the school. These checks are recorded on a suitable SCR.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

58. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Sherborne School
Department for Education number	838/6006
Registered charity number	1081228
Address	Sherborne School Abbey Road Dorset DT9 3LF
Phone number	01935 812249
Email address	enquiries@sherborneboys.group
Website	www.sherborneboys.group
Proprietor	Sherborne Group of Schools
Chair	Mr Christopher Samler
Headteacher	Mr Simon Heard
Age range	13 to 19
Number of pupils	539
Number of boarding pupils	501
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 March 2023

Information about the school

59. Sherborne School is an independent boarding and day school for male pupils, situated in Sherborne, Dorset. The school was founded in 1550 by King Edward VI. It is a charitable trust, overseen by a board of governors who act as the trustees. In August 2024, the School became part of the Sherborne Schools Group (SSG). Since the previous inspection, a new executive chair of governors, and a new headmaster have been appointed, and a new governing board has been convened.
60. Most pupils board at the school. There are eight boarding houses, situated close to the main school site or within the school's grounds.
61. The school has identified 111 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
62. The school has identified that 55 pupils speak English as an additional language.
63. The school aims to provide an outstanding, all-round education within a caring community based on Christian values. It seeks to support and challenge all pupils and give each of them the confidence to excel and achieve their personal best. The school endeavours to develop pupils' characters through the character education programme. The school aims to encourage pupils to develop a sense of personal identity, an ability to think and learn independently, integrity and to demonstrate a commitment to leadership and service. The school wishes to develop compassionate and considerate young men who are equipped with the skills, character and values to make a positive contribution to others.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

27 to 29 January 2026

64. A team of seven inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The onsite inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

65. 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 boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

66. 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