

School inspection report

10 to 12 February 2026

St Bernard's Preparatory School

Hawtreay Close

Slough

SL1 1TB

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 promote a school environment where both compassion and ambition are valued. They maintain a community that supports the school's aim for pupils to flourish academically, personally and spiritually within a caring Catholic ethos.
2. Governors and leaders work collaboratively to ensure that policies are implemented effectively and that Standards are met consistently. They create a cohesive school improvement plan that incorporates the needs and views of pupils and parents when deciding how to enhance and improve provision. Leaders provide comprehensive information, including reports for parents, school policies and contact details. At the start of the inspection, not all previous inspection reports were maintained on the school's website. This was resolved during the course of the inspection.
3. Leaders evaluate provision effectively and take considered actions that are linked to the school improvement plan, such as enhancing pupils' curiosity through open-ended investigations in science and introducing a reading passport to encourage pupils to read for pleasure. Leaders in the early years ensure that children are nurtured through positive relationships and an engaging learning environment.
4. Leaders maintain a broad and ambitious curriculum that enables pupils to make good progress across a range of subjects. Teachers plan a variety of engaging activities so that pupils are focused and calm in lessons. They help pupils to recognise that hard work and perseverance are important attributes in making progress. Teachers typically give verbal or written feedback to help pupils understand how to make further progress. However, pupils do not consistently know the precise steps they need to take in order to extend their learning and challenge their thinking.
5. Leaders establish consistent expectations for kindness and respect in the way that pupils behave at school. Teachers apply the behaviour and anti-bullying policies effectively so that pupils know these expectations. As a result, pupils display high standards of positive behaviour and are polite to teachers, peers and visitors. Training for pupils to be anti-bullying ambassadors contributes to the low incidents of bullying at school.
6. Leaders prioritise pupils' wellbeing by fostering a confidence-building climate where pupils develop their self-esteem. Pupils know that mistakes are not to be feared and are an important part of the learning process. They grow in confidence when they learn to reflect on and correct their mistakes and make progress. Positions of responsibility, such as faith and wellbeing ambassadors, are embedded in the school's practice so that pupils build their confidence and independence when fulfilling important roles on behalf of the school.
7. Adults throughout the school actively promote equality and inclusion, supported by the Catholic belief that God loves everyone. Teachers help pupils to learn about different cultures and backgrounds so that they understand and appreciate diversity. Pupils show curiosity and respect when finding out about the differences and similarities between themselves and others. As a result, pupils understand that they are unique but connected individuals within a multicultural community.
8. Leaders ensure that there is an effective safeguarding culture, characterised by responsive leadership, consistent practice and a shared understanding that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Governors undertake appropriate oversight of safeguarding, including the processes for safer recruitment.

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 previous inspection reports are made available on the school's website so that parents can form a proper picture of the school
- ensure that pupils consistently understand the specific next steps they can take to challenge and extend their thinking and learning.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing and create a genuine sense of belonging and community. They successfully embed the school's aims of providing a broad and balanced educational experience within a caring school community. Through the school's Catholic ethos, pupils are valued and recognised as unique individuals who learn to demonstrate values and morals, such as respect, perseverance, kindness and compassion.
10. Governors have effective oversight of the school's work to ensure that Standards are met consistently. Leaders provide reports and information for governors' meetings and have regular contact with the advisory board of governors with particular oversight of the prep school. This enables governors to provide appropriate support and challenge for leaders and work together with them to uphold the Catholic ethos of the school.
11. Leaders have the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to fulfil their roles effectively. They work collaboratively to promote the school's aims and to ensure that all policies comply with relevant statutory guidance. Policies are implemented effectively by staff and well understood by pupils.
12. Leaders are reflective about their work, striving to make the educational and pastoral experience positive and successful for pupils. They are ambitious in their strategic planning, responding to the views of staff, pupils and parents in the process. For example, ongoing dialogue with parents has prompted leaders to introduce residential trips from Year 3 upwards, and leaders recently introduced a wellbeing club and periodic wellbeing weekends that are free of formal homework, both at the suggestion of pupils.
13. Leaders in the early years have a thorough understanding of the needs of the children in their care. They identify appropriate actions to enhance their provision further and meet children's individual needs, such as focusing on the development of communication and language skills. Leaders ensure that staff in the early years can access relevant training relating to safeguarding and education. Staff maintain effective communication with parents so that they are informed about their child's educational experience.
14. Governors and leaders maintain strategic oversight of risk through a detailed risk management schedule. This enables them to proactively promote the wellbeing of pupils by identifying potential risks and considering how they can be reduced. Leaders implement an effective risk assessment policy so that they can review different risks, including site security, chemical storage and trips out of school. Leaders evaluate risk assessments to consider if any changes are required to mitigate risks further.
15. Leaders ensure that parents receive information about their child's progress, including detailed reports. They provide information on the school's website, such as contact details and key policies. At the start of the inspection, not all previous inspection reports were available on the website. This was rectified during the course of the inspection.
16. Leaders fulfil their legal obligations to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. They operate an effective accessibility plan that outlines actions to ensure that the school site, curriculum and school information are as accessible as is reasonably practical. Ongoing actions include reviewing

buildings to consider any further measures to improve physical access and considering how technology can further enhance access to information and the curriculum.

17. Leaders maintain effective partnerships with external agencies. They liaise with the local authority attendance officer about any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition times.
18. Leaders implement a suitable complaints procedure, which is available on the school's website. Complaints are managed effectively by following a three-stage process with appropriate timescales. Leaders keep records of any complaints, including any actions taken. Governors understand their role in the complaints process should the need arise.

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

19. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders promote a broad curriculum that is suitable to pupils' needs and enables them to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. The curriculum is enriched by leaders' aim for pupils to be curious and independent in their learning through regular themed activities, such as social action week. The curriculum is well planned through structured schemes of work that enable pupils to make good progress in their learning. This culminates in pupils experiencing success in gaining places at a variety of selective secondary schools.
21. Pupils make good progress across the curriculum, benefiting from teachers' focus on oral and written language. Teachers make effective use of quality texts as the centre of planning and teaching in English. As a result, pupils learn to appreciate a variety of genres and apply different techniques and advanced vocabulary to their writing. Pupils develop their numeracy through well-structured teaching that enables them to achieve high standards. They apply their firm understanding of numerical concepts to problem-solving activities. Pupils develop their creative skills in art, music and drama lessons, learning how to express themselves confidently and appreciate the aesthetic side of life.
22. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to plan lessons that are well structured and make effective use of a variety of resources. Pupils take part in activities that are engaging and tailored to their needs and prior attainment so that they make good progress. Teachers prompt pupils to apply and deepen their knowledge and skills, such as through debates in history, role play in English and investigations in science. Pupils behave well in lessons. They are courteous and respectful and are encouraged to actively listen to each other. This enables them to develop their understanding further by building on ideas and respectfully challenging the ideas of others.
23. Teachers provide effective verbal and written feedback so that pupils can make further progress in their learning. They help pupils understand how they can improve by working hard and learning from their mistakes. However, teachers do not consistently identify the specific next steps that pupils can take to extend and challenge their thinking and learning. As a result, pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to make progress.
24. Leaders analyse and evaluate assessment data thoroughly to identify necessary improvements to the curriculum and teaching. As a result, pupils' attainment is improved through initiatives such as the reading passports. These encourage pupils to read more for pleasure, thereby improving their reading overall. Leaders monitor pupils' attainment and progress and identify whether additional support is required for individual pupils. Teachers amend their planning and teaching as a result of these findings so that pupils' specific needs are met in lessons. Leaders and teachers participate in regular progress meetings that involve reviewing pupils' progress holistically so that they can provide wellbeing support as well as academic support when required.
25. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress in their learning as a result of early identification, targeted support sessions and effective communication between leaders and parents. Leaders ensure that teachers have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of pupils who have SEND so that they can plan lessons accordingly. Provision is clearly documented through individual plans that are evaluated regularly. Leaders ensure that staff have appropriate training and access to a comprehensive resource bank to support pupils' needs. They

make effective use of external experts, such as speech and language therapists, to support pupils' needs where required.

26. Leaders gather information to ascertain if pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL) and assess their levels of competence and fluency. They draw up individual language plans and targets for pupils who require help with speaking, reading and/or writing and review these regularly. Teachers include suitable strategies in their teaching, such as using picture cues and vocabulary banks. This support enables pupils who speak EAL to make good progress in their learning.
27. In the early years, leaders provide an appropriate play-based and practical curriculum that meets children's needs. They prioritise the development of oral language so that children develop their communication skills and vocabulary well. Teachers plan activities that enable children to develop knowledge and skills in a range of areas, including being creative and becoming numerate. Staff interact skilfully with children and use appropriate questions to support and extend their learning. Children acquire an early knowledge of phonics and use this to read and write simple sentences. Children make good progress throughout their time in the early years so that they are ready to move into Year 1 with confidence.
28. Leaders provide a varied range of clubs in order to enrich the curriculum. These enable pupils to further develop skills in areas they enjoy at school, such as sport, choir and reading, as well as acquire skills in new areas, such as chess, golf and dance. Pupils benefit from these experiences as they build their social skills and enhance their academic progress in engaging and enjoyable ways.

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

29. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

30. Leaders promote pupils' wellbeing by ensuring that the values of respect and kindness are embedded in the school's ethos and daily life. Staff act as role models through their nurturing interactions with pupils within an environment in which empathy towards others is seen as the norm. Pupils learn that everyone is created in the image of God and is a unique individual. Leaders help pupils to explore the implications of this so that they develop tolerance and respect for diversity at school and in the wider community.
31. Leaders continually promote the school's Catholic ethos so that pupils acquire a well-developed spirituality and moral awareness. Through religious education (RE) lessons and assemblies, pupils learn that God loves everyone. This promotes their connection to and compassion for others in their community. Leaders include prayers and hymns in daily routines, thus enabling pupils to reflect on positive thoughts about others. This enhances the development of pupils' sense of moral responsibility to empathise with and care for each other.
32. Pupils develop confidence in themselves as unique individuals who are valued members of their school community. Leaders and teachers know pupils well and recognise their achievements so that pupils develop their self-esteem. Pupils grow in confidence when speaking and performing in public, such as through debating activities or poetry and music recitals. They undertake leadership roles, such as faith ambassadors and anti-bullying ambassadors, which promotes their self-esteem as they make a positive contribution to the working life of the school.
33. Leaders provide an effective personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum so that pupils develop their understanding of mental health and emotional wellbeing. Pupils learn how to navigate their feelings and respond appropriately to situations such as dealing with pressure or anger. Staff support pupils in practising strategies for self-regulation such as colouring, going for a walk or listening to music in weekly pupil-led sessions.
34. Leaders in the early years provide appropriate support to enable children to develop physically and emotionally. Children improve their motor skills within activities such as climbing, balancing and riding trikes. They learn about different emotions, such as happiness and worry, and what these feel like. Teachers successfully enable children to develop their resilience through managing how they cope with making a mistake or dealing with disappointment.
35. Pupils learn how to promote their physical health through well-structured lessons in PSHE and science that encompass topics such as sleep, personal hygiene and healthy eating. The physical education (PE) curriculum is taught effectively and enhances physical health by developing pupils' co-ordination, stamina and fitness. Pupils consider how exercise also has a positive impact on their mental wellbeing. Through team sports, such as netball and hockey, pupils develop the skills to work collaboratively and to evaluate their performance within a team.
36. Teachers plan lessons in relationships education that enable pupils to develop healthy and nurturing relationships. Pupils learn how to maintain positive friendships and navigate conflict. They learn about different body parts and the changes their bodies will experience as they go through puberty. In age-appropriate ways, pupils learn about consent and their rights as individuals.

37. Leaders successfully promote behaviour and anti-bullying policies that are consistently implemented by teachers. As a result, pupils' behaviour is calm, considerate and courteous. Through PSHE lessons and in-depth anti-bullying training, pupils know that they should be upstanders, not bystanders. Older pupils are well equipped to fulfil their roles as anti-bullying ambassadors, supporting other pupils in resolving friendship issues. Incidents of bullying are rare and are resolved effectively when they occur.
38. Leaders ensure that the school site and premises are well maintained in order to promote pupils' physical wellbeing. They draw up systematic processes for checking and servicing equipment, including those relating to fire protection. Leaders conduct termly fire drills so that pupils know how to evacuate the building safely. They utilise external consultants to carry out audits and ensure that any recommended actions are carried out in a timely fashion.
39. Leaders ensure that pupils are well supervised across the school day so that they can promote pupils' welfare and attend to their needs. They maintain appropriate ratios for children in the early years, including when they are eating.
40. Leaders fulfil the requirement to maintain admission and attendance registers. They are proactive in promoting the importance of attendance by ensuring that parents understand the links between attendance, academic performance and wellbeing. Leaders have effective processes in place to improve attendance, should the need arise.
41. Leaders provide appropriate first aid facilities for pupils who are unwell or injured. There are a suitable number of people who are trained in first aid and administering medications. Staff in the early years have paediatric first aid training.

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

42. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

43. Through a carefully planned curriculum, teachers ensure that pupils have a well-developed understanding of British values and of how these relate to their own lives. Pupils learn about democracy in PSHE lessons and apply this knowledge when voting for positions of responsibility at school. Through discussions in PSHE and assemblies, pupils develop an understanding of the rule of law, why this is necessary for a cohesive society and how this relates to respecting their own school rules. Pupils know that they have individual rights and the freedom to make choices in their lives.
44. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to learn about different cultures and understand how to be inclusive. Pupils develop their knowledge of world religions in RE lessons and when they visit local places of worship. They learn about cultural events, such as Black History Month, in assemblies. Leaders ensure that books at school represent diversity and different cultures. Children in the early years develop their cultural awareness by having dressing-up days and trying foods from around the world. Pupils show curiosity and respect when learning about the cultural differences between people in the school and the wider community.
45. Leaders ensure that different aspects of the curriculum enable pupils to learn about life in British society. Teachers plan PSHE lessons that help pupils to learn about the role of governance and relate this to the election of pupil members to the school council. Pupils exercise their right to contact their MP, such as when they want to raise awareness and express their views about local issues. Through visiting Windsor Castle, pupils learn about the Royal Family's role in governance. Teachers facilitate debates about recent events reported in the news and help pupils to understand potential biases in the media. In discussions about political themes, teachers ensure that they present balanced views. Pupils develop their knowledge of the modern justice system in history lessons by comparing it to historical forms of justice, such as trials by ordeal in Anglo-Saxon times.
46. Leaders enable pupils to develop their social awareness and reflect on how they can show compassion to those in need. Pupils take part in social action projects, involving organised efforts to bring about positive change in the community. They select chosen causes, such as a children's hospital or environmental project, with the aim of promoting awareness in the school and local community as well as raising funds. They raise money and collect items for local charities, such as the baby bank and foodbank, and for national and international charities. This enables them to recognise that they can have a positive impact on the local community and wider world.
47. Leaders encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour and to recognise the difference between right and wrong. Pupils understand the importance of following rules. They reflect on their behaviour choices and are proactive in seeking and granting forgiveness. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to take on positions of responsibility such as faith ambassadors and pupil leaders. Pupils develop a mature understanding of the school's values and expectations for behaviour when acting as role models for others and encouraging younger pupils to follow their positive example.
48. Leaders in the early years enable children to develop their social skills well. Adults use circle times to discuss situations as they arise so that they can respond promptly to children's emerging social needs. They model and encourage respectful interactions with others so that children learn how to share and take turns. Adults help children to communicate with others as well as listen to each

other. As a result, children develop their ability to think about how others are feeling and how to manage disagreements.

49. Leaders ensure that pupils develop their economic understanding and financial literacy. The PSHE curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn about bank accounts, credit cards and budgeting. Children in the early years acquire an early understanding of the part that money has to play in their lives through using pretend money in their role-play activities. Older pupils apply their knowledge practically through activities such as spending an allocated sum of money at the Christmas bazaar or when budgeting for how they can buy a week's worth of lunch as part of the Junior Duke Award.

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

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

Safeguarding

51. Leaders establish a robust safeguarding culture. They ensure that all staff, governors and volunteers put safeguarding at the forefront of their work and understand that this is a collective responsibility. The school's safeguarding policies and procedures are based on relevant statutory guidance.
52. Governors have effective oversight of safeguarding. They receive up-to-date safeguarding training so that they have the relevant knowledge and understanding to support and challenge leaders. Governors visit the school and analyse reports to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding culture, policies and procedures.
53. Training for safeguarding is thorough and regular. All new staff take part in safeguarding training at induction so that they know how statutory guidance is enacted through the school's procedures. Leaders ensure that staff refresh their knowledge through further training, staff meetings and emailed bulletins. Staff discuss scenarios that test and enhance their knowledge in practical ways. The variety of different training methods results in staff being confident in reporting and recording any concerns about the pupils.
54. Leaders implement a suitable staff code of conduct so that adults working at the school understand the expectations for their behaviour. Staff know the importance of reporting concerns about adults, even concerns that are considered low level. Leaders respond appropriately through keeping a record of low-level concerns and liaising with the local authority when required.
55. Safeguarding leaders are responsive to safeguarding concerns and liaise proactively with external agencies. They ensure that pupils in need receive relevant and effective support. Leaders keep detailed records, including reasons for the actions they have taken. They refresh their knowledge frequently to ensure that the school's procedures are based on the most up-to-date information. Leaders review safeguarding risks and implement risk assessments when required.
56. Leaders use their secure knowledge of safer recruitment practices effectively. They complete all the required pre-employment checks to ascertain that staff are suitable to work with children. All checks are accurately recorded on a single central record of appointments (SCR).
57. Leaders provide pupils with a range of mechanisms to seek adult assistance and raise any worries. The nurturing relationships between adults and pupils mean that pupils are confident to speak to a trusted adult at school. They can also share their concerns via a worry box and through an online reporting system. As a result, pupils' welfare is effectively promoted so that pupils feel secure and safe.
58. Leaders have suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems in place so that pupils are protected when working online at school. These systems are checked and tested regularly. Computing and PSHE lessons help pupils to understand the measures they can take to keep themselves safe online, such as protecting their personal identity and being wary of potential scams.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	St Bernard's Preparatory School
Department for Education number	871/6000
Registered charity number	1148512
Address	St Bernard's Preparatory School Hawtrey Close Slough Berkshire SL1 1TB
Phone number	01753 521821
Email address	head@stbernardsprep.org
Website	www.stbernardsprep.org
Proprietor	St Benedict's School Ealing
Chair	Mr Michael Davis
Headteacher	Mrs Asha Verma
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	229
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 February 2023

Information about the school

60. St Bernard's Preparatory School is a Catholic independent co-educational day school in Slough, Berkshire for pupils aged two to eleven. The school is governed by the trustees of St Benedict's School Ealing, which is a registered charity. An advisory board provides additional governance specifically for St Bernard's Preparatory School. The school comprises two sections: the early years, for children aged two to five; and prep, for pupils aged five to eleven.
61. There are 73 children in the early years, which comprises two Nursery classes and two Reception classes.
62. The school has identified 23 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are no pupils in the school with an education, health and care plan.
63. The school has identified English as an additional language for 16 pupils.
64. The school states its aims are to initiate worship, celebration and prayer and to develop pupils' understanding of the need for care and consideration for others. It seeks to provide a broad, balanced and challenging curriculum and to nurture a love of learning. The school aims to teach pupils that they are unique individuals, made in the likeness of God and to be happy with the people they have become.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

10 to 12 February 2026

65. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

66. 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 the advisory board
- 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.

67. 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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