ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

15 to 17 October 2024

Ashley Manor Preparatory School

London Road

Charlton Kings

Cheltenham

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The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS **3**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS **4**

AREAS FOR ACTION 4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS 4

SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE **5**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE 6

SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION **7**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION 8

SECTION 3: PUPILS' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING **9**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING 10

SECTION 4: PUPILS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY **11**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY 12

SAFEGUARDING **13**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING 13

SCHEDULE OF UNMET STANDARDS **14**

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance *14*
Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health, and emotional wellbeing *14*

SCHOOL DETAILS **15**

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL **16**

INSPECTION DETAILS **17**

Summary of inspection findings

1. The school is led and managed effectively by an experienced leadership team who are committed to ensuring that the school meets its aims. However, there has been a lack of oversight regarding the implementation of recent guidance that relates to school attendance.

2. Leaders at all levels are invested in continual development and have been successful in improving the provision for pupils who attend the school. Wellbeing and pastoral care are prioritised, and teachers know their pupils well. Leaders promote the school values of 'believe, strive, achieve' in all that they do.

3. Subject leaders maintain careful oversight of the curriculum to check that it meets the needs of pupils. Comprehensive assessment across the school is used by leaders to shape the curriculum so that it enables pupils to build on their knowledge and skills and make good progress. Teaching is typically effective, and pupils make good progress in lessons that present suitable challenge and engage them. In some lessons, activities do not fully challenge pupils, and as a result pupils make slower progress in these lessons.

4. Leaders ensure that their restorative behavioural approach to incidents is understood by both staff and pupils, ensuring that pupils have a secure understanding of right and wrong. Pupils are polite and considerate towards both other pupils and adults alike.

5. Leaders and managers begin to prepare pupils for life in British society by encouraging initiative and contributions to the community. Leadership roles such as house captains and pupil council positions promote social engagement. The school helps pupils to develop empathy for others, both in the school and the wider world.

6. Early years staff develop a love for learning in children from an early age. Through an engaging curriculum and thoughtfully planned learning environment, children's interest is captured and their enthusiasm for learning is evident. Learning in the woodland environment further enriches children's experiences such as by developing investigative skills in science-based activities. Children are well prepared for their next stage of learning.

7. Leaders take steps to ensure that safeguarding procedures are effective. Safer recruitment procedures are rigorous and staff responsible for checks undertake their responsibilities diligently. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is knowledgeable and deals with any concerns in a timely manner. Staff understand how to identify and report a safeguarding concern.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not met consistently.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are not met consistently.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Areas for action

The proprietor must ensure that:

- the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and
- they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils

so that:

- the requirements of the statutory attendance guidance are fully embedded and implemented.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that tasks are well matched to pupils' prior attainment so that pupils make consistently good progress in all lessons.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. The proprietors have satisfied themselves that leaders in the school understand their responsibilities and effectively undertake their duties in almost all areas. However, proprietors have not ensured that the statutory attendance guidance is fully implemented and embedded. For instance, the attendance policy was not available on the school website as required both before and during the inspection, the new data retention timescales are not known, and the policy does not take account of the specific needs of certain pupils and pupil cohorts.

9. Leaders have embedded the aims and ethos of the school. Policies and procedures are largely understood and applied across the school. Leaders check that new staff understand what is expected of them through a suitably comprehensive induction programme. Staff are provided with ongoing training opportunities, such as in safeguarding and first aid.

10. Leaders are continually looking for ways to improve the provision for pupils in the school and regularly self-evaluate the school's processes and practice. Recent initiatives have resulted in improvements in pupils' progress in literacy and mental arithmetic. Leaders are fully aware of the need to consider unintended consequences for any decisions that they make.

11. Leaders have fostered effective links with a range of external agencies whose expertise helps pupils to get the most out of their school experiences, such as working with a play therapist. This approach is especially valuable for pupils who have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

12. The school manages risk appropriately with suitable risk assessments for routine areas of the school, as well as for specific issues, such as site security. Leaders have ensured that staff are aware of their duties with respect to assessing risk, and check that off-site trips are carefully planned and risk assessed.

13. The required information is provided to parents in a suitable format. The website includes up-to-date copies of key policies and information such as contact details for the school and proprietor. Parents are provided with termly written reports and invited to parents' evenings to help them understand how their child is progressing. In addition, parents of pupils in Years 3 to 6 receive half-termly grade reports. Parents whose children are in the early years receive a report at the end of the year that measures children's progress against the early learning goals.

14. The complaints policy outlines a suitable procedure to deal with any complaints should they arise. This includes specific references to timescales that relate to the early years foundation stage (EYFS) requirements, which differ from those of the remainder of the school. The school responds appropriately should there be a need to use this policy.

15. The school fulfils its duty in terms of the Equality Act 2010. The school is inclusive, celebrating all backgrounds and family makeups. Leaders ensure that pupils who have SEND or an education, health and care (EHC) plan are supported appropriately. Leaders are aware of the need to provide the local authority with an annual review of EHC plans where required. Leaders have a comprehensive plan that promotes the accessibility of its curriculum and accommodation for pupils who have a disability.

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

16. Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not consistently met.

17. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders and staff have planned a broad curriculum. Subject leaders monitor the curriculum closely to check its effectiveness on pupils' outcomes. Data is used to identify individual pupils' progress, cohort trends and to assess the effectiveness of teaching. Changes are implemented based on the outcomes of the ongoing monitoring, such as introducing groups for mathematics and English based on prior attainment, and the recent introduction of a spelling scheme as leaders identified that pupils required support in this area. Leaders closely monitor the impact that these changes make on pupils' progress.

19. Most lessons are planned effectively and provide suitable challenge. In mathematics lessons, the teaching provides sufficient challenge and successfully builds on pupils' prior knowledge so that pupils make good progress. In some lessons there is slower progress where activities do not fully consider pupils' prior learning.

20. Support for pupils who have SEND is a priority for leaders and teachers, with strategies such as one-on-one support, targeted resources and external specialist involvement, ensuring these pupils make good progress. The use of pupil passports and regular assessments allows staff to track the needs and development of each pupil effectively. Leaders and staff work collaboratively to provide tailored provisions, updating strategies regularly to address specific needs. Pupils who have SEND improve their work as a result of verbal feedback from teachers.

21. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are supported, including through adapted classroom materials where needed.

22. Music and drama are embedded across the school, with every pupil having the opportunity to perform, such as in the Christmas concert. Pupils' artwork on display throughout the school highlights the breadth and quality of creative subjects.

23. Assessment plays a central role in tracking pupils' progress across subjects. Pupils are confident to ask for help if they are finding work difficult; teachers help with prompts or hints.

24. Pupils are respectful towards each other and their teachers. There are clear expectations for behaviour within the classroom, which contributes to a calm atmosphere in most lessons. Pupils celebrate one another's success.

25. Leaders have ensured that staff in the early years have a deep understanding of the EYFS requirements and provide children with a range of interesting experiences that help promote enjoyment in learning from a young age. Staff carefully plan the environment to enable pupils to actively engage in learning. Activities provide reinforcement of learning objectives in different ways, helping children to retain new knowledge and make progress. Children develop early literacy and mathematics skills that prepare them for the move into Year 1. Children's learning is further enriched through the provision of specialist lessons, such as for French and music.

26. Leaders have crafted a diverse programme of extra-curricular activities, and participation levels are high. Pupils develop interests across a range of recreational and academic activities, from gardening to non-verbal reasoning. This programme of activities helps pupils to develop skills and self-esteem. Educational trips provide an extra dimension to pupils' learning experiences and help pupils develop a deeper understanding of topics.

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. Leaders consider pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing carefully. While there are many positive features of the pastoral care provided for members of the school community, leaders lack understanding around requirements to improve pupils' attendance.

29. Pupils' attendance is recorded as required through a twice-daily registration process. Staff maintain an appropriate admissions register and understand the need for clear procedures when recording and reporting those who leave and join at non-standard transition times to the local authority. However, staff do not demonstrate a secure awareness of all the recent changes to the statutory attendance guidance.

30. Clear behavioural expectations are embedded across the school. These are respected by pupils and consistently applied by staff. The school has an effective anti-bullying strategy, which is followed by staff who deal with cases of bullying should they arise. The focus on a positive approach to behaviour management fosters kindness across the age range. Positive relationships between staff and pupils are evident. On the rare occasions that pupils make poor behavioural choices, staff take prompt action and employ a restorative justice process. This helps pupils to learn from their mistakes and gain a better understanding of right and wrong. The school's understanding of individual pupils' needs ensures that actions and consequences are fair and proportionate.

31. Pupils are provided with age-appropriate areas and activities at breaktime, with robust supervision in place. This helps pupils to behave responsibly and enjoy time outside. The class buddy system, whereby older pupils visit children in pre-prep, brings much joy to both parties while at the same time developing their confidence and skills.

32. Assemblies provide opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity, inclusion and mutual respect. Pupils are encouraged to lead assemblies, which helps messages resonate with other pupils. Through the PSHE curriculum and classroom display, pupils learn to respect one another's differences.

33. Leaders ensure that the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculums are well planned, resourced and assessed, and that learning is extended beyond the classroom. For example, visiting speakers enable pupils to gain a deeper understanding of specific topics. Through ongoing tracking of these subjects, staff respond accordingly to areas where pupils' understanding requires further reinforcement.

34. Pupils enjoy a broad physical education (PE) curriculum, with both timetabled lessons and a range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils in the prep department participate in a range of sports fixtures against other schools and are proud of representing their school. Leaders recognise that not all pupils enjoy team sports and consider this when deciding what sports to offer, such as by including opportunities for pupils to engage in cross country and fencing.

35. Leaders have introduced a wellbeing curriculum that is shaped to suit pupils' needs and helps to develop self-knowledge. For instance, the introduction of a short period of mindfulness after lunchtime break enables pupils to be calm and ready to learn. The decision of leaders to provide a school farm and frequent outdoor learning opportunities helps support pupils' mental health. By

looking after livestock, pupils learn to be responsible, and the experience often has a positive impact on their self-esteem.

36. Leaders and staff in the early years ensure that children develop their physical, personal and emotional skills. Staff seize opportunities to discuss real-life issues with children to help them understand how to make the right behavioural choices, such as in daily circle times. Children experience a range of activities that promote their physical development, such as cutting and drawing, balancing and playing ball games outdoors.

37. Leaders ensure that the school buildings, facilities and grounds are appropriately maintained. Regular checks are carried out, including by external specialists where required. Maintenance staff promptly address any issues identified by staff. Health and safety practices are implemented effectively. Leaders maintain appropriate records for health and safety, and monitor issues through regular meetings. Proprietorial oversight is maintained through documented visits to the school as well as through health and safety reports. Staff are aware of their responsibilities for health and safety, and receive relevant training.

38. Suitable arrangements and accommodation are in place to care for pupils who become unwell or who have specific medical needs. Staff receive regular training in first aid and all staff in the early years are trained in paediatric first aid.

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

39. Standards are not met consistently with regard to admissions and attendance.

40. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.

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

41. Leaders promote fundamental British values and pupils understand their importance. Leaders foster an environment that celebrates differences. Staff strive to build a caring community and encourage pupils to be appreciative of themselves and others, both within the school and the wider world. Pupils display respect and tolerance towards one another and understand the importance of valuing individuals for who they are. Pupils recognise the importance of rules and laws, and express a secure understanding of right and wrong.

42. An appreciation of different cultures is fostered at an early age. In the early years, staff grasp opportunities to celebrate children's own cultures and languages. Children talk about their own experiences, such as their involvement in religious festivals, and gain a better understanding of others through learning from their friends. Children who speak EAL are made to feel valued by the teaching of key words from their first language to all children in the class. This enriches the learning experiences of all members of the class.

43. Through the PSHE curriculum, staff help pupils to develop social and financial skills from Year 1 to Year 6, such as money management and financial wellbeing. Leaders also link global economic understanding with real-life experiences, such as by involving pupils in financial planning for school trips. Charity work, such as organising bake sales and working alongside the parents' association on fundraising projects, develops pupils' understanding of the importance of giving back to society.

44. The school council provides opportunities for pupils to experience democracy and decision making within their community. Leaders use this forum to consult with pupils, for example by working on menu adaptations. Pupils are fully invested in the projects they undertake, such as planning a new outdoor reading area. Pupils know that they are listened to and that changes may happen because of their ideas. For example, a club that used to be just for female pupils was made available for male pupils as well.

45. Older pupils gain much from the opportunities to take on leadership roles within the school. Year 6 pupils take their roles seriously and understand that each position, such as house captain or ambassador, comes with a defined job description, not just a title. Pupil leaders recognise how they provide service to the school and are proud of this achievement.

46. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Transition within the school is enhanced because pupils are already well known to teachers through regular whole-staff meetings and opportunities to interact in daily school life. Leaders carefully manage pupils' move to their senior schools, for example, by asking pupils to complete a transition questionnaire which includes questions on future careers and senior school options. Staff use pupils' responses in these questionnaires to help support pupils and their families with their senior school choices. Leaders provide pupils with the opportunity to start thinking about their future by inviting visiting speakers to talk to them in Year 6. Examples include careers staff from a senior school and university speakers, as well as those from the financial business sector.

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

47. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

48. The safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures are regularly updated. All members of the community are clear about the part they play in keeping others safe, and who to turn to should they have a concern. Safeguarding training equips staff to deal effectively with any concerns about pupils. Staff know the procedures to follow and develop a greater understanding of best practice through regular opportunities to train and discuss scenarios. The DSL is proactive in checking that staff knowledge is secure, for example, by asking them to complete quizzes.

49. The proprietors oversee safeguarding arrangements, with an audit and an annual safeguarding report completed by the DSL and provided to the proprietorial body. The proprietors are informed about safeguarding concerns at an early stage and provide support to leaders in the school where required.

50. The DSL and deputy DSLs are suitably trained for their roles and demonstrate a clear working knowledge of how to handle a concern. They take prompt action to help pupils when required. Staff know the importance of reporting any low-level concerns about adults, recognising that these may contribute to a bigger picture. The DSL has established effective working relationships with the local safeguarding partnership and other relevant external agencies, which assists in providing pupils and families with additional support should there be a need. Those with responsibility for the leadership of safeguarding have a secure knowledge of local contextual issues and have considered the potential impact of these on the school.

51. Leaders ensure that pupils develop a secure understanding of safeguarding procedures, including staying safe online, through the PSHE and computing curriculum, where such topics are consistently taught and reinforced. Pupils are confident in the steps they should take to keep themselves safe online. Monitoring and filtering of internet use is in place to help keep pupils safe while using devices in school. Usage is monitored and logs maintained by leaders, indicating that action is taken should a concern be identified.

52. Leaders have devised various means to help pupils voice concerns to staff. These include using worry boxes or books and displaying safeguarding posters around the school. Pupils understand they can speak to a trusted adult if they have any worries or concerns and know that they will be helped.

53. Leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of their responsibilities to safer recruitment and take a robust attitude to risk. The record of staff appointments is well maintained and reflects the school's policy of not allowing an individual to start work before all recruitment checks have been completed.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

54. All the relevant Standards are met.

Schedule of unmet Standards

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

The following Standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34(1)	The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school –
34(1)(a)	demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
34(1)(b)	fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
34(1)(c)	actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.

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

The following Standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that –
7(b)	such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 15	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.

School details

School	Ashley Manor Preparatory School
Department for Education number	916/6077
Registered early years number	2771647
Registered charity number	293360
Address	Ashley Manor Preparatory School London Road Charlton Kings Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL52 6NR
Phone number	01241 388550
Email address	prepschool@ashleymanorprep.co.uk
Website	www.ashleymanorprep.co.uk
Proprietor	Alpha Schools Limited
Chair	Mr Ali Khan
Headteacher	Mr Paul Fathers
Age range	Birth to 11
Number of pupils	276
Date of previous inspection	4 to 6 February 2020

Information about the school

55. Ashley Manor Preparatory School is an independent co-educational day school and was previously known as St Edward's Preparatory School until 2023. It was acquired by Alpha Schools Limited in 2022. The school is overseen by the proprietorial body who also function as governors. The school comprises three sections: early years, including nursery, kindergarten and pre-school; pre-prep, including Reception to Year 2; and prep, including Years 3 to 6.

56. Since the previous inspection, the school appointed a new headteacher, who has been in post since September 2021. The founding director of Alpha Schools Limited acts as chair of governors and took over this role in January 2022.

57. There are 16 children in the early years in pre-prep, comprising one Reception class. The early years setting is registered and inspected by Ofsted. This includes nursery, kindergarten and pre-school classes.

58. The school has identified 24 pupils as having SEND. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an EHC plan.

59. English is an additional language for ten pupils.

60. The school states its aim is to provide an education that will last a lifetime and enable pupils to develop into happy, confident, resilient, compassionate and aspirational individuals. The intention is that pupils leave well prepared for a bright future and become positive and life-long contributors to society. The school has three values that underpin school life: 'believe, strive and achieve'.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	15 October to 17 October 2024

61. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The on-site inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

62. 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 head, 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.

63. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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