

School inspection report

25 to 27 February 2025

Oratory Preparatory School

Goring Heath

Reading

Oxfordshire

RG8 7SF

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. Governors play an important role in supporting school leaders and monitoring the effectiveness of their work. Through regular visits and communication, they ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively. While maintaining the school's unique identity, leaders effectively implement shared policies and resources due to the school's belonging to a larger organisation. The school consistently meets the Standards.
2. Leaders' development plans are informed through well-considered self-evaluation. A cohesive leadership team effectively promotes the school's motto, 'Cor Ad Cor Loquitur' (heart speaks to heart), which is understood by pupils and actively reinforced by the staff. This reinforcement of the school's ethos fosters a mutually respectful atmosphere. The school nurtures pupils' emotional, intellectual, social, creative, and physical development by emphasising its core values, referred to as 'virtues', of curiosity, kindness, and wisdom.
3. The balanced curriculum provides pupils with a well-rounded and enriching educational experience. Highly effective teaching, supportive interactions between staff and pupils, and efficient support systems contribute to a positive and motivating learning environment. Leaders' commitment to helping pupils achieve their academic and personal potential ensures that pupils are valued, challenged, and supported throughout their educational journey.
4. Leaders focus on prioritising pupils' academic and personal growth successfully so that pupils receive highly effective education and care. This is a significant strength. Leaders have high aspirations for all and have successfully developed a culture where pupils have faith in themselves. This enables pupils to develop their intellectual curiosity, motivation and socialisation particularly well. Through curricular and extra-curricular opportunities, such as the 'futures' programme pupils feel valued, challenged, and supported. Extensive individual support allows pupils to participate in these opportunities, helping them typically secure places at their secondary or senior school of choice, with many receiving scholarships and exhibitions.
5. Leaders foster a welcoming and supportive boarding environment that gives pupils a sense of belonging. Boarding house staff work as a cohesive team, creating a nurturing atmosphere where positive relationships make pupils feel valued and promote their wellbeing.
6. Parents receive regular communication about their children's attainment and progress. This is accomplished through a comprehensive reporting and assessment system that includes written reports and face-to-face or online meetings. However, reports provided to parents do not offer the same quality of information regarding pupils' progress in relationships and sex education (RSE).
7. Leaders actively promote the welfare, health and safety of pupils through robust procedures and systematic record-keeping. Leaders respond promptly and appropriately to rectify any potential health and safety defects. The school's premises, including the grounds, teaching and boarding accommodation, are well maintained.
8. Leaders and staff take a proactive and comprehensive approach to safeguarding, ensuring pupils feel safe, supported, and well-cared for. A culture of vigilance is embedded within the school community, with staff thoroughly trained in safeguarding policies and procedures and provided with regular updates. This vigilance means that staff remain alert to potential safeguarding risks and report concerns promptly. Leaders work closely with relevant external agencies to secure support

for pupils when required, and with governors and other safeguarding leads within the school group to share expertise and receive appropriate guidance.

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 reporting to parents about their child's progress in relationships and sex education (RSE) is as informative as that for all other subjects.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders maintain an inclusive and harmonious environment where pupils are supported pastorally and academically. They promote the school's aims and ethos to all stakeholders successfully and demonstrate a sustained commitment to continuous improvement. Pupil wellbeing is regularly monitored through tools such as pastoral surveys, which track mental health trends and detect areas where additional support may be needed. For example, pupils identified as less positive regarding their preparedness for lessons, are provided with targeted support to improve their organisational skills.
10. Governors provide suitable support and challenge, where necessary, to ensure that leaders have the knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities. Leaders and governors collaborate systematically to maintain a clear understanding of where the school is most effective and its areas for improvement. This awareness informs the development of a comprehensive plan aimed at enhancing pupils' emotional and intellectual wellbeing. For instance, leaders introduced a 'futures' programme which provides elective lessons and enrichment opportunities for all pupils with a focus on teaching skills for the future, such as team building and problem-solving. The 'futures' programme, which includes a future school element from Year 5, enables pupils to develop their confidence, self-esteem, and self-awareness extremely well. Pupils develop high aspirations, and these, combined with leaders' sustained focus on supporting their personal development, help pupils achieve academic success.
11. Leaders stay informed about legislative changes and relevant guidance. They make good use of external agencies' knowledge and advice to guide their decision-making on various matters, including safeguarding, academic support, and mental health services. Leaders and staff implement policies effectively and leaders and governors refine them as necessary.
12. The school meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010, including through the effective implementation of an accessibility plan. This plan includes specific measures for adjusting the curriculum and facilities to meet the needs of all pupils. Leaders take proactive steps to ensure pupils can achieve well, such as removing potentially distracting displays to minimise sensory and cognitive overload, based on thorough research and consideration of particular pupils' needs.
13. Leaders comprehensively analyse potential risks, including those associated with the school grounds. For example, they monitor records to identify any trends and supplement these with surveys of pupils' experience so that they can identify any potential hidden risks. Leaders' approach to risk management therefore is both strategic and effective, encompassing assessments that evaluate potential hazards linked to various activities while identifying appropriate measures to mitigate these. Leaders review and update risk assessments regularly to ensure continuous improvement, incorporating lessons learned from any past situations or near misses.
14. Leaders ensure that essential information is readily available to parents, primarily through the school's well-organised website. This includes details about school and boarding procedures, as well as all relevant policies. Parents receive regular updates on their children's academic and pastoral progress. However, these reports do not provide parents with the same level of detail regarding their children's progress in relationships and sex education (RSE) as they do for other subjects.

15. Leaders follow a clear and appropriate complaints policy when addressing grievances, including any related to boarding. They maintain records of all complaints and review them regularly to identify recurring themes, allowing for effective refinement of their practice.
16. In the early years, leaders effectively promote children's wellbeing. Skilled teachers and teaching assistants deliver engaging activities using well-planned resources in indoor and outdoor learning environments. This approach enables children to gain new knowledge, understanding, and skills while progressing in a secure purposeful environment that encourages positive engagement.
17. Leaders foster a welcoming and supportive boarding environment that instils a sense of belonging in pupils. They have established appropriate structures and systems for the induction of new boarders, ensuring they receive advice, guidance, and regular monitoring of their health and emotional wellbeing. Highly effective care from staff allows for an understanding of individual pupils' needs, leading to responsive support, and mutually respectful relationships.

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 have designed a curriculum that supports broad and deep learning across a wide range of subjects, with particular attention paid to meeting individual pupils' needs. It is age-appropriate and inclusive and provides pupils with suitable skills and knowledge across a wide range of subjects. The curriculum builds year on year to support pupils' early knowledge, ensuring that they are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils learn to think critically, especially through the 'futures' programme, where they use their knowledge and skills from different subjects to solve problems and debate maturely. The school's creative lessons are an integral and important part of the school curriculum. Pupils enjoy learning in aspects such as art, sport, drama and music, where successful teaching makes highly effective use of resources. Leaders undertake regular learning walks and progress meetings to monitor and promote high expectations. This supports leaders' desire to create a stimulating and vibrant learning community.
20. Children in the early years benefit from an interesting and stimulating curriculum, leading them to become motivated and successful learners. A 'sparkling start' and 'phenomenal finish' mark the beginning and end of topics. For example, at the end of the 'all about me' theme, the children recorded performing their stories, which they shared online with parents. This, together with staff designing activities that align with children's interests, helps ensure children remain enthusiastically engaged, and parents are regularly informed about their child's progress. Typically, children achieve the early learning goals (ELGs). Adults actively introduce new words and phrases through storytelling and purposeful conversations, modelling vocabulary that enriches children's language development. This approach enables children to grow into confident communicators.
21. Leaders are focused on balancing academic rigour and creativity, fostering an environment where pupils feel motivated to learn. Teachers plan lessons thoughtfully, managing class time and behaviours well and enabling pupils to acquire new knowledge. Learning is characterised by engaging and challenging content that encourages pupils to apply effort and show creativity. Teachers encourage pupils to listen carefully and think about what they hear. Pupils respond appropriately, justify their answers and value other pupils' perspectives and observations. They express their individuality confidently and challenge themselves to learn more. This contributes to their high levels of achievement overall.
22. Staff demonstrate secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects. This expertise is coupled with clear and constructive feedback, including the consistent use of immediate and precise marking which helps to drive academic progress and helps pupils to become reflective learners. Teachers successfully employ a variety of approaches to engage pupils' interest, such as challenging activities, questioning that encourages pupils to think for themselves, and a well-embedded culture where mistakes are seen as opportunities to develop learning further. Pupils are encouraged to become independent thinkers, as demonstrated by activities such as 'silent teacher' in mathematics, where pupils solve problems independently after observing their teachers model the process silently.
23. Leaders and staff closely monitor pupils' progress through regular assessments. These assessments include standardised tests and teacher-led evaluations, ensuring pupils' academic growth is closely tracked. Teachers use this data to make informed decisions about curriculum delivery, adjusting their teaching content and methods where necessary. This results in pupils making good and often rapid progress from the varied starting points.

24. Leaders have implemented an effective support system for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The leader of the provision for those who have SEND uses effective diagnostic tools to track and monitor progress, ensuring that appropriate strategies are implemented. Information about pupils is disseminated to all teachers through regular conversations, and details are provided in a pupil passport. This is used well to meet pupils' needs. For example, some pupils use specialist resources to improve concentration, whilst others receive support from external professionals. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress. Pupils displaying high levels of anxiety are also suitably supported, including sessions with the emotional support assistants to help manage their emotions.
25. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) make good progress and rapidly develop their English language skills. This is because teaching addresses any specific language needs in a sensitive way and provides pupils with effective support for their English in lessons when required. For example, teachers regularly check in with pupils and provide them with pertinent language resources such as key word lists.
26. The school's extra-curricular activities programme is both extensive and well attended. The breadth of activities, including creative, cultural, sporting and academic opportunities, engages pupils' interests and develops their wider skills. Boarders have sufficient free time, and a wide range of activities are organised using the extensive school grounds and facilities. This supports their interests, helps them develop their independence, and creates supportive relationships with other boarders.

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 nurture pupils' emotional wellbeing by fostering an inclusive environment and promoting mutual respect, including through the curriculum's exploration of issues relating to equality and diversity. Pupils learn that everyone is unique and that their identity and individual background should be acknowledged and respected.
29. Pupils have the space to express their thoughts and feelings, including through reflective activities such as writing prayers about what they want to give up for Lent. This approach promotes emotional expression and self-reflection, helping to develop their confidence. Additionally, all pupils participate in music, dance, and drama productions, allowing those with diverse skills to achieve in front of their peers, further promoting mutual respect and confidence.
30. The school develops pupils' spiritual understanding and knowledge through a well-taught religious education (RE) curriculum, weekly chapel services, assemblies, and daily periods of reflection. Teachers facilitate meaningful discussions that enhance pupils' understanding of a diverse range of religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Prayer areas in every class and displays throughout the school encourage pupils to appreciate the values and principles of different faiths and develop respect for them.
31. The school's broad and well-designed physical education (PE) curriculum and programmes enhance pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing well. Highly effective and inclusive PE teaching across various indoor and outdoor sports helps pupils build co-ordination, confidence, self-esteem, and teamwork skills, as well as develop their techniques in the particular sports. Weekly swimming lessons begin at an early age, promoting strength, endurance, and confidence about being in water.
32. Leaders implement a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme. Pupils learn about a variety of topics, including relevant social issues such as the risks of drug and alcohol abuse. These lessons are age-appropriate, equipping pupils with the knowledge and skills to make informed choices. Focused events such as 'mental health awareness week' create further opportunities for open discussions about mental health. Staff use a range of effective learning strategies like creative colouring and yoga to support pupils' emotional wellbeing.
33. The effective RSE curriculum meets the requirements of current statutory guidance and also of the Catholic diocese. It successfully builds pupils' ability to establish positive and warm friendships. The spiral curriculum ensures that material and activities are age-appropriate, allowing for suitable progression with well-delivered content. It helps pupils develop an understanding of healthy relationships and of essential issues such as consent, how the body changes during puberty, and looking after one's own personal safety.
34. Leaders promote positive behaviour by emphasising courtesy and respect. Pupils behave well throughout the school and understand how their actions affect others. Displayed behaviour prompts and posters in every class, such as 'mistakes are expected and respected', reinforce clear expectations. Consistent implementation of the behaviour management and anti-bullying strategies supports the development of an environment of mutual respect. Incidents of bullying are infrequent, and leaders handle these effectively when they do occur, with prompt strategies addressing inappropriate behaviour or resolving conflicts among friends.

35. In the early years, there is a well-mapped-out programme for developing children's personal, emotional and physical development. Children respond positively to the nurturing approach of adults who are attentive to their needs and allow them to explore and discover things for themselves. Children are kept physically and mentally active through many opportunities to complete problem-solving activities, such as negotiating an obstacle course around the outdoor equipment.
36. Leaders ensure pupils' welfare through a robust approach to health and safety. They maintain the premises well, keep thorough records, and consistently perform relevant checks, including those related to fire safety. Leaders take appropriate precautions to reduce the risk from fire, including undertaking a fire risk assessment and carrying out routine fire evacuation drills, including during boarding hours.
37. The school effectively supervises pupils outside lessons through suitable staff organisation and suitable staff-to-child ratios in the early years. The supervision of boarders is equally robust, with staff within the boarding house always available to provide appropriate support, including overnight.
38. Admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained, with proactive monitoring leading to high attendance rates. The school promptly informs the local authority whenever pupils join or leave at non-standard transition times.
39. The school adopts a comprehensive approach to first aid. Staff receive suitable first aid training, including paediatric first aid training for those in the early years. They implement robust processes for storing and administering medication or first aid.
40. Boarding accommodation is comfortable, allowing pupils to personalise their spaces and securely lock away their valuables. House staff know pupils well, and highly effective leaders of boarding take proactive steps to enhance boarding accommodation, considering boarders' views. Recent developments include purchasing a new projector for movie nights and enhancing the pupils' kitchen space. Boarders learn responsibility through various leadership opportunities, and their roles are clearly outlined. Leaders ensure that the physical needs of boarders are met by providing opportunities for exercise, socialising and relaxation.
41. Leaders have recently changed the catering provision to improve the quality of food. The catering department works closely with the pastoral and other teams, including boarding, to ensure that diets are balanced and adapted to meet any needs. The food provision is varied, nutritious and of high quality.

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. The promotion of pupils' financial literacy is embedded in the curriculum throughout the school. In early years, children engage in role-play activities such as pretend shops that introduce them to coins and money. By Year 3, pupils start to grasp the principles of annual household incomes through their 'around the world' topic. As they advance to Year 8, pupils develop their understanding of budgeting. During PSHE lessons, pupils tackle practical issues like tax, bank accounts, and personal finance management to help to prepare them for future financial responsibilities. Additionally, hands-on learning, such as fundraising for the end of Year 8 celebration evening, allow pupils to apply these concepts in meaningful ways.
44. The school develops pupils' understanding of the importance of respect for everyone. Pupils explore issues relating to cultural diversity and equality during assemblies and PSHE lessons. Pupils learn about different forms of prejudice and how these impact on people, including through days with a specific focus and talks from individuals, such as that from a Paralympian rower that raised awareness about disability. The exploration of such themes supports pupils' development of moral principles and understanding of right and wrong. Whole-school initiatives encourage pupils to develop broader cultural knowledge, for example learning about Chinese New Year during a recent 'culture week'. Various trips and excursions enable pupils to explore different cultures and communities, with recent visits to France and Italy developing pupils' first-hand cultural knowledge.
45. In the early years, adults teach children to care for and respect one another. They serve as positive role models, helping children form successful friendships. Children quickly learn to take turns, share, and collaborate. Staff actively guide children to co-operate during play and mealtimes.
46. The careers guidance programme builds older pupils' knowledge and understanding of different career paths through various talks, workshops, and visits that include consideration of stereotypes. The programmes include talks from lawyers, Formula One statisticians, anaesthetists, and landscape designers, as well as visits to institutions such as a Royal Airforce base, where female role models such as pilots and referees inform pupils' consideration of non-traditional career paths. The 'futures' programme fosters problem-solving and team-building skills and features an annual career fair that every pupil attends. From Year 5, this programme provides individual support for the next steps in their education. These opportunities, which include preparation for entry examinations and individualised interview practice help pupils gain a realistic view of their future options while encouraging them to aim high in their aspirations.
47. Teachers stimulate pupils' social and political understanding through assemblies and lessons focusing on citizenship. The PSHE programme enhances pupils' comprehension of democracy and respect for public institutions. For instance, pupils learn about the Houses of Parliament and how elections work. Teachers respond to current themes in the news, helping pupils engage with themes such as the situation in particular parts of the world and the impact of extremism and populism. Teachers ensure that any political themes or content are discussed impartially and without bias.
48. Leaders actively promote positive relationships among pupils and their development of a sense of community through various mixed-age activities such as buddy reading and house events. Pupils are encouraged to develop leadership skills by taking on roles such as anti-bullying ambassadors. In

these roles, they help their peers resolve problems, promote inclusivity, and embody the school's values of kindness, curiosity, and wisdom.

49. Pupils develop their sense of social responsibility through active involvement in charitable and social initiatives and community service. Outreach work includes singing to the elderly at a care home and raising money for a Catholic charity through an annual 10km walk.
50. Boarding staff develop boarders' understanding of how their actions can affect the house community. This is extended to all members of the school, where pupils actively accept responsibility for their actions. Through assemblies and PSHE lessons, pupils gain an understanding about the laws of different societies, and they are aware that the freedoms offered in British society are not replicated across the globe. As a result, pupils understand the importance of rules and laws in their school and the wider society.

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

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

Safeguarding

52. Leaders have embedded and maintain an effective safeguarding culture in the school. The safeguarding policy aligns with current statutory guidance and is implemented effectively to promote the wellbeing of both day and boarding pupils. Leaders also take and act on external advice when necessary. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) liaises effectively with local safeguarding partnerships in the two authorities where the pupils reside, ensuring that any required referrals are made promptly and effectively.
53. Representatives from within the wider school group contribute their perspectives to support governors' effective oversight of safeguarding. During monitoring visits, they engage with leaders and analyse reports to understand issues, track trends, and evaluate the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements and responses to any safeguarding concerns.
54. The safeguarding team maintains a suitable and consistent approach to the recording and monitoring of safeguarding concerns, including any low-level concerns about staff. This coherent system enables the suitably trained safeguarding team to review any incidents and detect any trends that might need consideration.
55. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities provide comprehensive induction training to give new staff and volunteers confidence in their roles. This is followed by regular safeguarding updates and training to refresh staff's knowledge and inform them of any changes to current statutory guidance. This ensures that all adults involved in the school are well informed about any changes in practice and are clear about their responsibilities and of how to respond to different types of concern, such as child-on-child abuse or radicalisation and extremism.
56. Computing and PSHE lessons emphasise the importance of keeping safe, including online. For example, pupils are taught about the dangers of talking to strangers both in-person and online. This message is further reinforced by posters in every classroom reminding pupils to 'zip it, block it, and flag it'. A robust filtering and monitoring system is in place and is regularly reviewed by safeguarding leaders, who take appropriate actions as necessary. Pupils understand how to raise concerns, such as through worry boxes and are confident that issues will be dealt with appropriately by staff who listen, care for, and respect them.
57. Leaders follow suitable safer recruitment procedures. They ensure that all required suitability checks are completed before staff or governors begin working at the school. These checks are accurately recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR). Governors systematically scrutinise the SCR to confirm that all new appointments have been appropriately checked.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Oratory Preparatory School
Department for Education number	931/6055
Address	Oratory Preparatory School Goring Heath Reading Oxfordshire RG8 7SF
Phone number	0118 9844511
Email address	office@oratoryprep.co.uk
Website	www.oratoryprep.co.uk
Proprietor	Bellevue Education International
Chair	Mr Mark Malley
Headmaster	Mr Andrew De Silva
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	305
Number of boarding pupils	23
Date of previous inspection	2 to 5 November 2021

Information about the school

59. Oratory Preparatory School is an independent Catholic co-educational day and boarding school. It was founded in 1859 and is situated in Goring Heath near Reading. The school has been owned by Bellevue Education International since 2019 and is overseen by a board of governors. The current headmaster took up his position in September 2022.
60. The school has one boarding house and offers full, weekly and flexible boarding for pupils in Years 3 to 8. Boarders are accommodated on the top floor in the main school building with separate areas for male and female pupils.
61. There are 81 children in the early years, which comprise three Nursery and two Reception classes.
62. The school has identified 48 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. The school has identified 32 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
64. The school states its vision is to provide outstanding learning experiences for all. As a school founded by St John Henry Newman it aims to live the motto Newman bequeathed, 'Cor Ad Cor Loquitur' ('heart speaks to heart') with an emphasis on being courteous and respectful, showing kindness, consideration and compassion with a willingness to forgive and be open to change. The school's values, which it refers to as 'virtues' are curiosity, kindness and wisdom.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

25 to 27 February 2025

65. A team of four 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
- 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.

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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