

School inspection report

6 to 8 February 2024

Dean Close School

Shelburne Road

Cheltenham

Gloucestershire

GL51 6HE

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 |
| 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..... | 5 |
| SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION | 6 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION | 6 |
| SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING | 7 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING | 8 |
| SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY | 9 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY | 10 |
| SAFEGUARDING | 11 |
| THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING | 11 |
| SCHOOL DETAILS | 12 |
| INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL..... | 13 |
| INSPECTION DETAILS | 14 |

Summary of inspection findings

1. The aims of the Dean Close Foundation are clearly articulated and are in keeping with the school's Christian ethos. Leaders give clear messages to the school community about how these values can be expressed in school life.
2. The board of trustees (who provide governance) and school leaders are thoughtful and rigorous in their planning for the school's future development. Senior leaders and managers know pupils well and the consideration of the wellbeing of pupils informs their decision-making at every level.
3. Leaders regularly review the curriculum to ensure that it is adapted effectively to meet the needs of pupils. Teachers' subject knowledge and a detailed knowledge of individual pupils' needs enables them to adapt resources effectively and to give pupils effective and regular feedback. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make rapid progress and achieve well as a result of high quality, personalised support from school staff.
4. The quality and variety of co-curricular provision allows pupils of all ages and aptitudes to participate and develop skills such as effort, self-motivation and teamwork. Leaders create opportunities for all pupils to contribute to wider society through charitable fundraising and volunteering.
5. Most pupils are happy at school and enjoy positive relationships with school staff and their peers. Pupils' behaviour is generally courteous and considerate. However, some pupils make unkind or disrespectful comments to their peers.
6. Leaders and managers responsible for health and safety ensure that there are consistently high standards of maintenance, risk assessment and compliance throughout the school. Leaders implement a planned programme of refurbishment of school buildings across the school site.
7. Leaders ensure that all staff are trained appropriately in safeguarding. A dedicated school manager ensures that recruitment checks are thorough and are accurately recorded and this is overseen by trustees.
8. Boarding is well resourced and well managed. Boarders appreciate the support of house staff who create an environment in which boarders feel safe, known and cared for. Effective supervision of pupils is in place in day and boarding houses with staff regularly visible, which helps pupils to feel safe.

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:

- staff address effectively the behaviour of some pupils who make disrespectful comments about their peers.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Trustees ensure that leaders and managers are well trained and possess the skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles effectively. Staff and pupils feel well supported by leaders of the school.
10. Processes for a cycle of school development planning and self-evaluation review are well established. Trustees work effectively with school leaders to assess the impact of initiatives, such as developments in provision for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE). Trustees are committed to hearing about the views and experiences of school life from pupils and staff.
11. Leaders actively consider how the Christian character of the school can be impactful on the lives of pupils who may not share a Christian faith. For example, the value of flourishing, derived from the New Testament, informs provision for the wide range of co-curricular opportunities on offer, which is devised so that each child can find an activity where they can develop their talents and contribute to the school community.
12. School leaders place an emphasis on humility and transparency in their consideration of how they respond to day-to-day issues and in the way they plan for the future. Leaders throughout the school carefully consider the needs of individual pupils and this informs their decision-making. Consequently, pupils including boarders feel well-known and cared for by staff.
13. Effective risk assessment, supported by external oversight ensures that standards are met in regulatory areas such as health and safety across the school site. In meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, leaders make appropriate reasonable adjustments to accommodate the physical access needs of current pupils.
14. Parents receive regular reports about pupils' progress and other relevant information is available on the school's website or by request from the school office.
15. Leaders address any complaints face-to-face at the earliest opportunity in line with school policy. This is effective in resolving complaints at the initial stage.

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

16. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. The curriculum provides pupils with a broad educational experience. Leaders review the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs and interests of pupils. For example, after consultation with pupils, new A-level subjects in photography, media studies and sociology were added to the curriculum offer. Enrichment opportunities, including the Extended Project Qualification, advanced cookery courses and Junior Sports Leader qualifications, ensure pupil access to a wide-ranging and appropriate curriculum.
18. Leaders provide effective training for teachers through research groups, which meet to explore and develop aspects of teaching such as questioning and assessment for learning. In class, teachers employ a range of suitable techniques to check pupils' understanding and assess pupils' knowledge. This allows teachers to identify areas where pupils need further clarification and review so that pupils are able to consolidate their knowledge.
19. Teachers use their detailed knowledge of pupils' needs to deliver well-planned lessons effectively. This helps pupils to enjoy their learning and supports them to make good progress. Teachers use their subject knowledge and skilful questioning to stretch and challenge pupils effectively. For example, in A-level coursework in creative subjects, teacher questioning scaffolds pupils' thinking in developing the ambition and scope of their projects.
20. Teachers provide pupils with detailed and constructive feedback. Comments are clear on how pupils can improve their work and there are clear expectations of a pupil response. This feedback, together with use of praise helps pupils to build on previous learning and to make progress.
21. Teachers tailor support and resources effectively for pupils who have SEND so that pupils are able to access the curriculum. Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive high quality individual support and make swift progress in developing fluency in English and a wide vocabulary. Additional provision of clinics by departments enables pupils to consolidate their learning at their own pace and gain greater confidence in their use of language and subject knowledge.
22. School leaders have taken steps to diversify the co-curriculum to cater for as many interests as possible with new clubs initiated in response to pupils' suggestions. The breadth of opportunity in the co-curriculum encourages enthusiastic commitment from pupils of all ages and talents.
23. Boarding activities are varied and popular. In the evenings, boarders bake, swim, play basketball or badminton, or spend time in their house doing crafts, playing games or simply relaxing. There is a comprehensive programme of weekend activities. There are also trips to the cinema, local towns and cities for recreation and cultural experiences. In essence, boarders enjoy their life at school.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

25. Leaders place a strong emphasis on the importance of respect and compassion. Senior pupils, as well as staff and senior leaders, model these qualities. The peer mentoring scheme formalises the support provided by older pupils for younger pupils. Pupils are respectful of all groups of people and leaders promote an 'active bystander' approach, where pupils challenge or report inappropriate behaviour in line with the anti-bullying policy. Leaders and staff provide additional support for pupils through frequent opportunities in the curriculum for discussion, education and reflection.
26. The embedded house system provides a sense of community and the close, supportive relationships within houses support the growth of pupils' self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence.
27. Pupils attend 'The Hub' which is a relaxed and informal space for pupils to explore their spiritual understanding together. The Chapel provides a more formal and central role in school life, providing an important element in the development of pupils' self-understanding. Both spaces are inclusive of pupils of all faiths and none.
28. Leaders' accurate self-evaluation supports leaders' decision-making to strength the PSHE curriculum and to develop the RSE curriculum. As a result of discussions in PSHE, the curriculum has been adapted to provide increased, dedicated lesson time to support pupils in examination years.
29. Pupils enjoy many opportunities to take part in physical activity through lessons and taking part in competitive fixtures and recreational sport. Pupils also appreciate the social benefits of team sports.
30. Leaders and staff promote an anti-bullying culture and record both incidents of low-level behavioural issues and those incidents requiring more serious sanctions effectively. Most pupils behave well. In lessons, pupils listen attentively and value others' contributions. Teachers promptly address pupils' behaviour in lessons in line with school policy. At break and lunchtimes and during free-time, pupils are lively and sociable. Pupils value the experience of community living and make strong friendships across the year groups. However, a minority of boys make disrespectful comments, to girls in particular, and their unkind behaviour has a negative impact on their peers
31. Leaders maintain effective oversight and regularly review provision to ensure high standards of health and safety across the school site. Buildings and facilities are gradually being refurbished and there is a thorough system of monitoring to identify any maintenance issues. The school meets fire safety regulations and leaders ensure that regular fire evacuation practices are undertaken, including during boarding hours.
32. Boarding accommodation is comfortable and pupils feel safe and relaxed in their surroundings. Pupils have scope to individualise their rooms and communal areas are homely. Older boarders to have single studies, some ensuite, giving them a feeling of independence akin to university life.
33. The attendance and admission registers are well maintained and staff follow up pupil absence in line with school policy. Staff provide appropriate supervision of pupils across the school site.
34. The school's medical provision is well resourced, with specialist practitioners providing first-aid support for pupils' physical and mental health needs.

35. Boarding is well organised and run by trained and experienced staff. New staff undertake a detailed staff induction training programme and all staff new to boarding are mentored by experienced practitioners. Pupils speak highly of house staff and are appreciative of their support.

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

36. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

37. Staff actively promote British values and encourage mutual respect of different faiths and cultures through the planned curriculum. For example, pupils explore challenging topics on world conflicts in history, in a sensitive and thoughtful manner. Pupils develop their understanding of British institutions, law and democracy across the curriculum in geography, history, careers and PSHE.
38. In geography, pupils learn about the human, social and economic impact of methods to counter climate change, such as afforestation and using renewable energy. Pupils in the sixth form have the opportunity to follow a certificated enrichment course which develops practical cookery skills and an understanding of food related issues such as the economic and environmental benefits of eating fruit and vegetables in season.
39. The introduction of a bespoke enrichment programme for sixth formers is effective in preparing pupils for adult life. The programme covers relevant themes including adult finances, British society and world perspectives. Pupils apply their learning to real life contexts, for example, pupils research the areas where they live and learn about decisions made by their local political leaders in relation to local issues and priorities. Older pupils develop their understanding of the world of work through the opportunity to gain paid employment as lifeguards at the school pool.
40. School visits and themed dining events celebrating the food and traditions of countries across the world support pupils' cultural understanding.
41. Careers provision is effectively embedded into school life, such that pupils feel confident to explore a range of options, including applying for apprenticeships and universities outside the United Kingdom. Pupils are actively encouraged to take ownership of their future plans and make informed decisions about their next steps after school. As a result, pupils are successful in securing their first or insurance choice of university destination or in securing employment or training in their chosen field.
42. Pupils contribute to the school community by having an impact on decision-making through the pupil voice. For example, the quality of food at lunchtime and for boarders at weekends is improved following pupil feedback.
43. School leaders identify whole school themes to develop pupils' understanding of the purpose of service in the school and wider community. This year's theme of 'unity' involves senior school pupils volunteering to help to lead clubs in the prep school, acting as role models to younger pupils.
44. Charitable activities are embedded in school life. Pupils enjoy devising ways to fundraise for school charities, such as participating in a singing competition, in support of the school's link school abroad. On field days, pupils are encouraged to give their input into the planning of how they can contribute to the lives of those living locally. This includes playing in an ensemble at a local retirement home and running sports activities for pupils at local primary schools.

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

45. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

46. Trustees provide effective support for the pastoral team and for the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) by ensuring that suitable resources are allocated to safeguarding. For example, the DSL is supported effectively in their role by deputy DSLs. Trustees ensure that policies reflect current legislation and are effectively implemented.
47. Leaders maintain an accurate overview of safeguarding risk factors, including those posed by contextual factors such as online influencers and radical extremism. Leaders analyse safeguarding data, track patterns and trends across the school and swiftly implement actions to safeguard pupils when necessary. Leaders liaise appropriately with external agencies when required.
48. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online and leaders receive alerts from the effective filtering and monitoring system so that potential risks in pupils' online activity can be addressed.
49. Safeguarding training is updated regularly so that all staff are confident in identifying and reporting safeguarding concerns. Effective supervision of pupils is in place in day and boarding houses with staff regularly visible and accessible to pupils.
50. The pastoral team knows pupils well and they feel safe and well looked after. The organisation and staffing of all houses, availability of nursing and mental health practitioners, an independent listener and trained peer mentors support pupils and provide them with a range of people in whom they may confide.
51. Rigorous guardianship processes are in place and are regularly monitored by leaders. Boarders are surveyed after visits to their guardians and any concerns are followed up robustly, including through spot-checks and liaison with other agencies.
52. Checks on the suitability of staff and adults working with children are rigorous and staff recruitment processes are effective. Leaders maintain an accurate central record of appointments which is monitored by an external audit.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

53. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

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| School | Dean Close School |
| Department for Education number | 916/6035 |
| Registered charity number | 1086829 |
| Address | Shelburne Road Cheltenham GL51 6HE |
| Phone number | 01242 258000 |
| Email address | office@deanclose.org.uk |
| Website | deanclose.org.uk |
| Proprietor | Dean Close Foundation |
| Chair | Mrs Kathryn Carden |
| Headteacher | Mr Bradley Salisbury |
| Age range | 13 to 19 |
| Number of pupils | 519 |
| Number of boarding pupils | 251 |
| Date of previous inspection | 19 to 21 March 2021 |

Information about the school

54. Dean Close School is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged between 13 and 19 years. The school was founded in 1886 as a boys' boarding school and became fully co-educational in 1972. The school along with three other schools and five nurseries forms the Dean Close Foundation, which is a registered charity governed by a board of trustees. The school is located on a 50-acre parkland site near the centre of Cheltenham which it shares with its preparatory and pre-preparatory schools.
55. Boarders are accommodated in six single sex boarding houses including two specifically for sixth-form pupils.
56. The school has identified 69 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
57. English is an additional language for 112 pupils.
58. The school states its aims are to encourage, nurture and inspire pupils; shaping their mindset to seek opportunity, be curious about learning and have a deep desire to impact the world around them. On a journey in preparation of adulthood, the school aims to guide pupils to make informed decisions about their next steps in life. Following its Evangelical Christian foundation, the school seeks to provide an environment where each individual's qualities, interests and potential are respected and encouraged. It holds community, respect for others, relationship and service at the heart of its ethos.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

6 to 8 February 2024

59. A team of 7 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

60. 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 trustees
- 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
- 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.

61. 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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