

School inspection report

30 June to 2 July 2026

Dean Close Airthrie School

27 – 29 Christchurch Road

Cheltenham

GL50 2NY

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.....	5
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	5
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	6
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	7
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	8
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	9
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING.....	10
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	11
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	12
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	13
SAFEGUARDING	14
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	15
SCHOOL DETAILS	16
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	17
INSPECTION DETAILS	18

Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders are successful in promoting the school's aims and values. They apply systematic self-evaluation and monitoring to ensure quality and consistency of provision for pupils and are ambitious in their approach to implementing change for the benefit of the school community. Leaders are supported effectively by trustees who possess the necessary expertise and experience to provide challenge and support to leaders. Trustees undertake rigorous oversight of school development planning and monitor the implementation of policies effectively through regular meetings and visits to the school, ensuring that the Standards are met consistently.
2. The school's inclusive ethos and aims are embedded in its culture and daily life. Pupils are known and valued as individuals and their wellbeing is prioritised. They develop academically, personally and socially and are well prepared for the lifetime of learning ahead of them. The well-planned curriculum and the individual learning programme (known as the BEAR programme) for each pupil provide appropriate learning opportunities tailored to their ages, needs and prior attainment. As a result, pupils make good progress. The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL) is expertly and thoughtfully managed and effectively integrated into the life of the school.
3. Leaders in the early years are knowledgeable about children's development. They provide a well-planned curriculum with a range of stimulating activities to engage children in their learning. Both the indoor and outdoor environments offer opportunities for children to develop their independence, skills and interests. The curriculum is enhanced through specialist teaching, which broadens children's experiences and raises aspiration. The whole-school focus on personalised provision ensures learning is closely matched to individual needs, enabling children to engage successfully across all areas of learning. Transition arrangements into Year 1 are carefully planned to support continuity in children's learning and development.
4. Leaders ensure that pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are promoted effectively through personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), pastoral care and the programme of sport. Leaders and staff implement the behaviour and anti-bullying policies fairly and consistently, resulting in pupils showing respectful and positive behaviour. Leaders actively promote pupils' understanding of the importance of positive mental health. Staff support pupils effectively and, as a result, pupils are confident in their understanding of emotional wellbeing that is promoted through the care and support they receive.
5. The school premises are maintained well. Health and safety procedures, including fire prevention measures, first aid and medical provision, are well organised and fulfil statutory requirements.
6. Leaders ensure that pupils access human and social education which fosters pupils' understanding of the contribution they can make to society, as well as respect for different cultures and backgrounds. Economic education supports their emerging understanding of life skills such as money management. Leaders encourage pupils' service to the school through opportunities to take on roles of responsibility, developing their awareness of the difference this can make to others. However, opportunities for pupils to make a wider range of meaningful links with their local community are less developed.

7. Safeguarding is effective and follows statutory guidance. Leaders and staff know their pupils well and promote a vigilant safeguarding culture that supports pupils' welfare. Pupils know how to report any concerns if they are worried. Staff use established systems to record and act on concerns. Trustees oversee policy and record regular reviews. Risk assessments, supervision and safe recruitment procedures are well implemented.

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:

- enhance opportunities for pupils to contribute more effectively to the lives of those in the local community in order to develop their understanding of the wider world.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Trustees and leaders work together as a cohesive team to plan and implement a strategy which actively promotes pupils' wellbeing. They use a variety of information, such as assessment scores and surveys, to develop a broad understanding of the school's successes and areas for improvement. Together, leaders and trustees take a strategic approach to ensuring that the school's practice is monitored and reviewed. They are ambitious in their ongoing plans for school development and take effective actions to bring this about, for example the decision to implement personalised learning plans for every child.
9. Trustees bring a wide range of skills and expertise to their roles, such as in safeguarding and education. They visit the school regularly to meet staff and pupils, and offer scrutiny, challenge and support to leaders. As a result, trustees assure themselves that leaders have the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities thoughtfully and effectively. The school meets the Standards consistently.
10. The school's values and aims are central to the daily life of the school, well known and promoted consistently by members of the school community. Pupils are encouraged to explore new experiences, contribute widely and show care and compassion towards each other. They are supported to mature and develop, including the youngest children in the early years, where knowledgeable leaders provide a curriculum that supports their early learning and development, including in communication and language.
11. Leaders ensure that an appropriate risk assessment policy is in place and implemented effectively. Leaders understand the context of the school and are alert to any related risks posed to pupils. Suitably detailed risk assessments are in place which are regularly reviewed, including those related to premises checks, trips and vulnerable pupils.
12. Leaders review policies regularly and ensure that staff understand and implement them consistently. All required policies and information for parents and external agencies are provided, mainly through the school's website, including inspection reports and statutory documentation. Parents receive regular written reports about their child's progress and achievement. Leaders fulfil their responsibility to provide information to the local authority relating to any pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). This includes information about financing of EHC plans.
13. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils' wellbeing is well supported. Safeguarding leaders liaise with the local authority, children's services and mental health teams to take effective action to provide specialist support for pupils when needed. Attendance is monitored rigorously in collaboration with the local authority.
14. The school has a suitable complaints policy which is made available to parents so that they know how to raise concerns informally or formally. Leaders ensure that complaints are handled appropriately and dealt with in a timely manner. They review the complaints log regularly to identify any patterns or trends. Leaders' actions ensure that the school's complaints policy and procedures are followed consistently.
15. Leaders ensure that the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, including through the implementation of a detailed accessibility plan. This plan identifies the school's actions to make

the curriculum and premises accessible and to make further reasonable adjustments where necessary.

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. Leaders provide a thoughtfully designed curriculum which is implemented effectively through carefully planned schemes of work covering a balanced range of academic and creative subjects. The content is well sequenced to support pupils' progression over time. Leaders monitor teaching and learning through classroom visits and regular scrutiny of pupils' work. They provide training for staff to help them carry out their teaching responsibilities well. This enables pupils to develop skills, knowledge and understanding appropriate to their needs, ages and prior attainment.
18. Leaders personalise pupils' experience of the curriculum through the establishment of an individualised learning programme which sets targets for each pupil in the school. This ensures that pupils benefit from curriculum provision that is adapted according to their educational, emotional and social needs. Teachers provide tailored support and challenge, which increases engagement and ensures that pupils are encouraged to achieve.
19. Children in the early years begin their learning journey in a nurturing and stimulating environment where priority is given to the development of communication and language needs. Phonics teaching ensures that children learn the sounds made by different letters. This knowledge enables them to begin to learn to read and write simple sentences independently. Early mathematical activities support children to identify number patterns and count confidently in ones, twos and tens. The early years curriculum is enriched with specialist teaching in sport, music, drama and French. This enables children to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding across a range of subject areas. Transition to Year 1 is carefully managed through familiarisation sessions with staff and handover information, including the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile assessment.
20. Older pupils acquire knowledge and a range of different subject skills. When studying a text in English, they learn to use inference to retrieve information about story characters. In mathematics lessons, pupils develop their problem-solving skills as they calculate the areas of different shapes. Staff promote cross-curricular opportunities which enhance the continuity of provision across year groups. In both history and religious education (RE) lessons, the use of drama supports pupils' creativity and confidence. For example, pupils act out elements of the story of Grace Darling and work in pairs to represent different human values such as forgiveness and generosity. These links enhance pupils' ability to transfer knowledge and skills between subjects effectively.
21. Teachers use their good subject knowledge, high-quality resources and a range of effective teaching methods to enable pupils to acquire new knowledge and skills. Positive relationships between teachers and pupils, built on respect and listening to each other, result in pupils being confident to share their ideas and engage in dialogue. This helps them to develop deeper understanding of their work and progress. Pupils are articulate and courteous speakers who demonstrate genuine enthusiasm and motivation for learning.
22. Leaders identify the needs of pupils who have SEND swiftly and accurately. They provide detailed training and guidance for staff so that pupils' needs are addressed effectively during lessons. Staff make suitable adjustments using carefully written plans with recommendations for the teaching strategies to be used. This ensures that adaptations such as specific activities, visual timetables and sensory resources enable pupils who have SEND to access learning fully alongside their peers. Leaders provide pupils with additional support, such as through small-group or individual sessions, if

necessary. They liaise with external therapists to ensure that pupils who have SEND are supported well to learn effectively in lessons and make good progress.

23. Leaders identify and support pupils who speak EAL, including those who are in the early stages of learning English, and bilingual pupils. This includes staff training to ensure that planning is adapted to provide additional activities in lessons, such as word and picture prompts to support pupils' vocabulary development, speaking and writing. This enables pupils who speak EAL to make good progress.
24. Leaders collect assessment data to enable them to monitor pupils' progress. They analyse this data with teachers and check how pupils are performing in lessons. This enables leaders to gather a detailed picture of each pupil's individual needs and progress. Where required, leaders arrange extra support sessions to help pupils who may not be making sufficient progress or would benefit from a confidence boost. Assessment data is also used to inform any school development priorities, for example the purchase of new reading books to support comprehension skills.
25. Recreational clubs are popular and well attended. A broad range of activities including cookery, dance, sewing, cross country, chess and tennis is provided to encourage pupils to try new things. Educational visits and residential trips enable pupils to apply their knowledge and skills in new contexts and deepen their curiosity about the world around them.

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

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

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

27. Leaders place priority on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of pupils. Staff know pupils well and respond promptly and sensitively to their pastoral needs. Pupils' emotional wellbeing and mental health are well supported through PSHE lessons. Pupils are taught to recognise and regulate their emotions and manage a range of different situations. Staff are well trained to support individual pupils, for example by offering safe spaces and resources to support sensory needs, which promotes pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs effectively. Staff build caring relationships so that pupils are valued and recognised. Pupils make confident contributions during lessons and within the school community, and this builds their self-knowledge and self-esteem.
28. Leaders promote moral and spiritual development through assemblies, PSHE and RE lessons, and moments for reflection during the school day. Pupils discuss feelings, celebrate each other's achievements and consider the needs of others. Music is used to create calm, contemplative moments, while collaboration across age groups, such as older pupils engaging with younger children to gather their views and offer pastoral support, further develops empathy and emotional awareness.
29. The curriculum for PSHE, which includes relationships education, is well planned. From the early years onwards, pupils learn about important topics in an age-appropriate and sensitive way. Younger pupils learn about friendships and families. Older pupils explore healthy relationships, choice, control and consent in greater depth. Parents are consulted and kept informed of curriculum updates, so they understand what their child is learning.
30. The school has developed a physical education (PE) curriculum that provides pupils from the youngest age with activities to develop their physical skills, health and wellbeing. Lessons are well planned to ensure that pupils of different aptitudes make progress and are confident to participate at their individual level. Pupils experience a range of sports such as rugby, swimming, netball, hockey and cricket. This develops their speed and agility through sustained practice and feedback from staff. Staff support pupils to make healthy choices at lunchtimes and teach the benefits of regular sleep, exercise and good dental health, as well as appropriate use of screen time.
31. Leaders and staff apply the school's behaviour policy consistently and reinforce expectations through assemblies and class routines. They recognise and reward positive behaviour so that pupils typically behave well. Pupils understand boundaries and recognise that sanctions help them take responsibility for their behaviour. As a result, they engage respectfully and kindly with each other and contribute to the calm environment which supports learning well. Instances of bullying are rare and dealt with promptly when they occur. Leaders analyse behaviour and bullying records in order to identify any emerging patterns and to provide individual guidance and support to pupils where needed.
32. Leaders follow current statutory guidance relating to admissions and attendance. They maintain suitable admission and attendance registers and inform the local authority whenever pupils leave or join the school at non-standard times of transition. Leaders create a positive culture of attendance and work closely with families to ensure they understand the importance of supporting their child's high attendance. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance regularly and act effectively to address concerns.

33. The school premises and accommodation are clean and well maintained, providing a suitable learning environment for pupils. Leaders ensure that health and safety is well understood, consistently implemented and rigorously overseen across the school. Leaders promote a culture of collective responsibility, supported by comprehensive risk assessments, staff training and clear systems for reporting issues and scheduling required checks. Suitable fire safety measures are in place, including fire risk assessments and drills so that pupils and staff know what to do in case of emergency. Trustees carry out effective oversight of health and safety systems to make sure these remain fit for purpose.
34. The school provides suitable medical and first aid arrangements to support pupils who are injured or unwell. Accidents are recorded, reported appropriately and monitored to check for any trends.
35. Pupils are well supervised during the school day, including during break and lunchtimes and when participating in off-site trips. In the early years, leaders make sure that the required ratios for staff and children are maintained at all times, including when children are eating.
36. Leaders in the early years promote wellbeing through regular physical activity, emotional support and teaching about healthy eating. Children benefit from well-resourced outdoor spaces that help develop gross motor skills and resilience. Staff foster positive relationships and encourage independence. For example, children choose mark-making and cutting tasks, and work quietly and independently for sustained periods, accompanied by calming music.

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

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

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

38. Leaders promote respect and inclusion throughout the curriculum, reflecting the school's ethos of celebrating and supporting uniqueness. They ensure that pupils develop appreciation and respect for diversity through their lessons about different world religions. This is enhanced by visits to local places of worship. Leaders' review of the humanities curriculum ensures greater representation of women in history. For example, pupils study the suffragettes and learn about equality and the developing role of women in society. Leaders and staff use teaching opportunities to develop pupils' awareness of diversity, for example through studying texts containing characters with physical differences. Teaching explores music and art from around the world. As a result, these experiences help pupils to develop their understanding of the importance of mutual respect and tolerance.
39. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils are well prepared for transitions within school and on to their next destination school. Children in the early years develop the skills and confidence to enable a smooth transition to Year 1. The 'future steps' preparation programme supports older pupils with the admissions process to secondary education, including study skills and interview practice. This typically enables pupils to achieve success in their assessments for entry to senior schools and prepare for the new challenges and expectations of senior school life.
40. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of right and wrong. This is due to the school's emphasis on the importance of considerate, respectful behaviour and careful modelling by staff and older pupils who act as supportive role-models for younger children. Leaders reinforce the school's values through recognition in assemblies of pupils who show the values of 'love, courage and contribution'. They encourage pupils to reflect on and take responsibility for their actions and the choices they make.
41. Leaders support pupils to understand responsibility and service to others. Pupils contribute to the smooth running of the school by taking on roles of responsibility and serving on committees and the school council. Older pupils meet with younger pupils to represent their views to leaders. Leaders respond positively, for example by providing recycling bins in classrooms. Pupils take part in national charitable initiatives such as Children in Need. However, their understanding of the impact of local charitable work is still developing, and opportunities for pupils to forge links in the local community are less established.
42. Leaders ensure that pupils develop an understanding of democracy and the rule of law. Pupils take part in elections for roles of responsibility and vote for charitable initiatives. In their daily lives, pupils learn the importance of rules and, as they grow older, how laws govern British society. This enables pupils to make links between school rules and the world around them. Visits from the fire brigade, the local member of parliament and the police support pupils' awareness of British institutions and services. Leaders ensure that information and teaching, including from external speakers, remain balanced and non-partisan.
43. Leaders prepare pupils for future economic wellbeing through the curriculum, practical experiences and entrepreneurial opportunities. In the early years, children take on roles in imaginary play scenarios such as the class shop so that they learn how money is used. In mathematics and PSHE lessons, teachers introduce financial literacy, including simple budgeting and informed spending choices. The life skills programme supports pupils' understanding of debit and credit cards, savings,

mortgages and interest. In computing lessons, pupils create different families and plan their weekly shopping needs and other expenses. Older pupils take part in an enterprise challenge to design a product or service which they sell to the school community to raise money for their chosen charity. These experiences build initiative and problem-solving skills which prepare pupils to apply their knowledge of finances to everyday contexts with growing confidence.

44. In the early years, children's social development is supported effectively through opportunities to work as a team, listen to each other and take turns. Children embrace kindness and respect towards each other through the agreed classroom rules. Pupils from Reception upwards belong to a house, which supports a culture of belonging. Children take part in events which help them begin to think of others by contributing donations to a local foodbank. Children are introduced to festivals and celebrations such as Easter and Remembrance Day, which deepens their understanding of different traditions.

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. Leaders place pupils' welfare at the centre of their decision-making so that a clear safeguarding culture is evident throughout the school. Adults understand that keeping pupils safe is everyone's responsibility. This collective understanding informs how staff engage with pupils and respond to concerns.
47. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures take full account of relevant guidance. Leaders liaise effectively with the local authority to ensure that pupils and families receive the help they need. Trustees, who are suitably trained, oversee safeguarding through visits, reviews of documentation and regular audits, including the school's safeguarding policy. They provide effective support and challenge to leaders with responsibility for safeguarding to help ensure that pupils are kept safe.
48. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding have appropriate training, knowledge and experience for their roles. They are aware of contextual safeguarding risks and take suitable steps to mitigate these. Leaders seek timely advice from the local authority and children's services and make appropriate referrals. They monitor and review the latest information to ensure that they are taking reasonable steps to safeguard pupils' wellbeing.
49. Safeguarding training for staff is regular and appropriate. Leaders use staff induction, whole-school updates and ongoing reminders to reinforce safeguarding procedures. Staff respond confidently when concerns arise. They know how to recognise signs of risk and harm, record concerns accurately and escalate matters swiftly. This includes concerns relating to pupils and adults working at the school.
50. The school follows comprehensive procedures for staff recruitment, including training for staff involved in recruitment and the systematic recording of outcomes. All required checks are undertaken and recorded on the single central record (SCR) of appointments. This document is scrutinised by trustees to make sure it remains accurate and up to date. Staff files are complete and stored securely. These measures ensure statutory requirements are met and give assurance that adults working in the school are suitable to work with children, thereby supporting pupils' wellbeing.
51. Pupils are well informed about how to keep themselves safe, including online, through PSHE teaching, other lessons and assemblies. Secure internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place on school devices. These systems are tested regularly and monitored by trustees to ensure their effectiveness and reliability in mitigating risks of access to inappropriate online content. Safeguarding leaders respond promptly to any alerts they receive.
52. Pupils are clear about how to share concerns through 'pupil voice' boxes, class worry boxes, pastoral support sessions and speaking to trusted adults. They are confident that staff will respond in a way that helps to support them and address their concerns effectively.
53. In the early years, leaders and staff prioritise children's safety. Children build trusting relationships with the adults who support them, fostering a warm, nurturing and secure learning environment. Leaders follow the safeguarding requirements for working with young children. For example, they ensure that appropriate adult-to-child ratios are maintained at all times and staff hold relevant qualifications for their roles. Mobile phones are not permitted in the setting. Daily safety checks are completed, and children are supervised closely, including during snack and mealtimes.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

54. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Dean Close Airthrie School
Department for Education number	916/6037
Registered charity number	1086829
Address	Dean Close Airthrie School 27 – 29 Christchurch Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL50 2NY
Phone number	01242 512837
Email address	admin.office@airthrie-school.co.uk
Website	www.deancloseairthrie.org.uk
Proprietor	Dean Close Foundation
Chair	Mrs Kathryn Carden
Headteacher	Mr Jason Dobbie
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils	60
Date of previous inspection	13 to 15 June 2023

Information about the school

55. Dean Close Airthrie School is an independent co-educational day school situated in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, which caters for children aged three to eleven. The school is part of the Dean Close Foundation and is managed by a board of trustees. A new chair of trustees has been appointed in July 2026. Dean Close Airthrie consists of three sections: the early years, for children aged three to five years; pre-prep, for pupils aged five to seven years; and prep, for pupils aged seven to eleven years.
56. There are eight children in the early years in one Reception class.
57. The school has identified 25 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
58. The school has identified English as an additional language for a very small number of pupils.
59. The school states its aim is to allow each child to flourish, through their experience of excellent learning opportunities combined with the values of love, contribution and courage which the school focuses on every day, whilst recognising and supporting each child's individual learning journey.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

30 June to 2 July 2026

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

61. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- discussions with trustees
- 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.

62. 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

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

For more information, please visit isi.net