

School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

Cheltenham College

Bath Road
Cheltenham
GL53 7LD

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 ensure that leaders have the necessary skills and knowledge to support their roles, as well as checking the effective implementation of suitable policies and procedures. Governors monitor leaders' work rigorously and provide them with appropriate challenge and support. They visit the school, including boarding houses, regularly and know it well. They meet with staff, pupils and boarders to ensure that the provision meets the school's aims and fulfils all regulatory requirements so that the Standards, including the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (NMS), are met consistently.
2. Leaders demonstrate a clear vision for the curriculum and wider provision and ensure alignment to the school's ethos, particularly in promoting curiosity, character, community, creativity and continuous excellence. Leaders provide a well-sequenced curriculum. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and they enable pupils to make good progress through well-planned lessons and effective use of resources. Leaders implement an effective centralised tracking system that enables them to identify trends in data and improve outcomes for underperforming pupils. This tracking system enables staff to identify pupils' needs and support their good progress. Leaders identify the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and ensure teachers implement effective strategies to support their learning.
3. Leaders provide a wide range of co-curricular opportunities that have a positive impact on pupils' mental and physical development and wellbeing. Leaders ensure that opportunities in sport, drama and music are available to all pupils and that they are given the chance to excel. The recreational programme develops skills for pupils of all abilities. The supportive school and boarding environments underpin pupils' good academic progress, their access to competitive sports, educational visits and opportunities for service to the wider community.
4. Leaders support pupils' physical, mental and emotional health effectively. Positive relationships between pupils and staff foster a deep sense of belonging. The well-planned personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes equip pupils to make informed personal choices and explore their own attitudes, so that they understand perspectives different from their own. Pupils and boarders show respect for different ethnicities and backgrounds, benefiting from opportunities to explore different views in a balanced way. Leaders have also established purposeful provision to promote pupils' social and economic understanding, including community action and partnerships.
5. Leaders provide boarders with comfortable, secure and well-maintained accommodation. Boarders can access appropriate medical provision and secure storage for possessions. They receive good-quality meals with suitable choices. They learn the benefits of inclusion and mutual respect and demonstrate high levels of self-esteem and self-knowledge. Boarders appreciate rewards and understand the need for sanctions. However, boarding leaders do not ensure the consistent administration of rewards and sanctions.
6. Careers guidance permeates all aspects of school life and departments. Talks and activities broaden understanding, enabling pupils to gain knowledge of routes into apprenticeships, higher education, conservatoires, national and international universities, and employment. Departments ensure that careers education is a part of the curriculum and embedded in lessons. Alumni offer opportunities for work experience, through which pupils can explore future careers.

7. Leaders implement the complaints policy effectively. They maintain an appropriate complaints log and monitor it regularly to ensure any trends are identified.
8. Leaders take a proactive and responsive approach to risk management, for instance when considering the wellbeing of pupils who have disabilities or specific learning needs. Leaders demonstrate respect for all people and ensure that teaching does not discriminate against a pupil. Leaders ensure the accessibility plan informs decisions on refurbishments, new building works and pupils' needs. Leaders make adaptations to support pupils' physical needs through a combination of well-considered access points, temporary movement of classrooms or additional transportation to enable, for instance, a pupil to move through the site.
9. Leaders' thorough approach to all aspects of safeguarding ensures that policies and procedures support pupils' safety and promote their wellbeing. However, at the time the inspection began, staff did not ensure that all the required information about pre-employment checks was recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR). This was rectified before the completion of the on-site inspection.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that all information relating to safer recruitment is stored on the single central record of appointments
- ensure boarding house staff implement the behaviour policy so that pupils are managed consistently across the different boarding houses.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities have appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties effectively. Governors work closely with leaders to provide both scrutiny and support, assuring themselves that the Standards are met.
11. Leaders ensure that there are processes for self-evaluation, which directly inform the school's development plan. They put pupils' wellbeing and happiness at the centre of their planning and decision-making. They collaborate successfully with governors to support the development of pupils' skills and personal qualities and promote their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. Leaders create an environment that promotes excellence and curiosity and facilitates a commitment to the service of others. Teachers provide a positive learning culture so that pupils engage readily and positively in their learning.
12. Leaders maintain regular and positive links with external agencies, including the local authority, children's services and educational professionals, such as speech and language therapists and occupational therapists. Leaders report to the local authority those pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition points. Leaders also know that they must provide the local authority with information about any pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including information related to finance and funding.
13. Leaders provide parents of current and prospective pupils with information about the school's policies on its website. Parents receive regular and helpful reports about their child's progress, attainment and attitudes. These reports provide valuable guidance as to how pupils can take the next steps in their learning. Leaders ensure that there are also opportunities for parents to meet formally with staff to discuss their child's development.
14. Leaders take a proactive and responsive approach to risk management. Pupils' wellbeing is prioritised through the detailed identification of risk and the implementation of appropriate strategies to manage and mitigate these risks. A clear policy and suitable staff training result in detailed risk assessments that cover the school's premises, educational trips and the welfare of pupils who have specific educational or medical needs. Leaders review and modify risk assessments after each activity to ensure they remain effective.
15. Leaders ensure that teaching does not discriminate against any pupil and the school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders provide an appropriate accessibility plan that prioritises actions to ensure pupils can access the school site and the curriculum. Leaders ensure that teaching supports pupils who have SEND.
16. Well-trained boarding leaders create a culture characterised by mutual respect and tolerance. They establish clear boarding principles, which they review regularly to reflect the school's ethos and expectations. Leaders ensure comprehensive and well-structured induction for boarders, including targeted support for international pupils.
17. Leaders implement the complaints policy effectively. They take prompt action to follow up any informal or formal complaints submitted by parents about the school or boarding so that they are suitably resolved. The complaints log is both appropriately maintained and monitored regularly to ensure that trends are identified.

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 establish a broad and balanced curriculum, enabling pupils to experience a wide range of creative, scientific, linguistic, mathematical and technological subjects. The curriculum is engaging and ambitious. Leaders monitor the quality of the curriculum through lesson observations, work scrutiny and feedback from pupils. They use these strategies to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the school's teaching and learning.
20. Effective teaching enables pupils to make good progress. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and use a range of approaches to support pupils' learning. For example, in creative subjects, pupils benefit from well-planned project work and exposure to exemplar materials, which support the development of their ideas and techniques. In English and Greek, clear modelling and structured approaches ensure pupils develop analytical and linguistic skills. Pupils enjoy individual, self-directed work, such as research tasks and creating mind maps, which enables them to gain confidence and cement their own knowledge.
21. Self-motivated pupils take pride in their studies. They work confidently and independently to explore wider contexts through their own research. In history, they ask insightful questions and tease out information from a variety of sources, bringing together information and making succinct notes. Pupils regularly synthesise information, developing their knowledge and articulating ideas with confidence in lessons. Pupils consolidate prior learning in geography by discussing key development indicators eloquently and using pertinent acronyms accurately. Pupils enjoy opportunities to be creative. They work purposefully and enthusiastically on designing, cutting and manufacturing their own clothing items, showing dexterity in their use of sewing machines.
22. Leaders implement systematic, well-developed assessment to track pupils' progress, drawing on baseline testing, and regular internal marking and testing. Staff analyse performance across different groups of pupils. Departmental summaries and faculty-level oversight support the early identification of trends and enable timely and appropriate action. Teachers use this data, together with formative feedback and pupil self-reflection, to support pupils' progress.
23. Across the school, teachers provide regular feedback, including written, verbal and, in some cases, audio feedback, which pupils use to improve their work. Older pupils benefit from prompt, frequent and detailed feedback, alongside ready access to individual support outside lessons. Pupils respond thoughtfully to their teachers' feedback, identify areas for improvement and make progress in their learning.
24. Leaders ensure the early identification of and support for pupils who have SEND. Well-trained teachers receive detailed information and implement appropriate strategies such as individual or small-group sessions focused on specific skills such as literacy or organisational strategies. As a result, these pupils make good progress.
25. Leaders assess pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) promptly to identify their needs and provide them with effective support. Specific strategies, such as graphic organisers and visual cues, build pupils' confidence and enhance their proficiency in spoken and written English.
26. Pupils take part in a wide range of co-curricular activities. This includes The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE), Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and extensive music, drama and sporting

activities. As a result, pupils develop their passions, acquire new skills and interests and build greater confidence.

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. Through daily chapel services, tutor periods and PSHE lessons, leaders successfully create a culture characterised by mutual respect and a sense of community. Pupils learn about the harms caused by prejudice, discrimination and misogyny and staff teach them to avoid these attitudes. Staff support pupils' individuality and promote their self-confidence and self-esteem.
29. Staff teach a carefully developed RSE programme through the PSHE curriculum, supported by relevant chapel themes that are led by the pupils themselves. At the beginning of the academic year, leaders consult parents about the content taught in RSE lessons and seek their views through surveys and parents' meetings. Pupils learn about themes such as privacy, different family structures, how to build healthy relationships and consent. The programme also ensures that pupils know how to seek support inside and outside school. Staff assess pupils' knowledge and understanding of these themes through questionnaires and pupils' written work. They use this information to modify the programme as necessary.
30. Staff implement the school's behaviour policy fairly and consistently and reward pupils' positive behaviour appropriately. As a result, typically courteous and well-mannered pupil conduct is evident throughout the school. Leaders implement a robust anti-bullying strategy. They teach pupils to report any instances of bullying and to reject 'banter'. Staff respond promptly and thoughtfully to the rare instances of bullying. They support both the victim and perpetrator in order to modify behaviour appropriately, re-establish good relations and promote social responsibility.
31. Leaders support pupils' sense of security and self-confidence by ensuring effective supervision throughout the school day and especially during breaktimes and co-curricular activities. This contributes positively to the consistently good relations between staff and pupils.
32. Pupils learn about the world's major faiths in well-planned religious studies (RS) lessons. They visit different places of worship and attend daily chapel services. Pupils learn to appreciate the non-material aspects of life and the wonder of the natural world through the study of art, music, literature and drama, and participation in a variety of outdoor activities.
33. Leaders create a well-structured, welcoming boarding environment. They provide effective and supportive pastoral care, which promotes boarders' confidence. Pupils take part enthusiastically in house competitions and enjoy a broad and well-planned programme of evening and weekend activities, encouraging further participation and the development of their interests. Leaders ensure that boarders are appropriately supervised, including overnight and during weekends, when they can always contact a trusted adult. Regular house meetings provide boarders with opportunities to express their views on house life and suggest constructive changes. If they have concerns about their own welfare or that of their friends, they can talk privately to boarding staff, to members of the safeguarding team or contact an independent adult who visits the school regularly. However, leaders do not ensure consistency between the houses as regards the administration of rewards and sanctions.
34. The prefect system provides pupils with opportunities to make a positive contribution to school life. Well-trained senior pupils take on roles such as heads of houses and anti-racist prefect. They display high levels of social and community responsibility, raising awareness of pertinent issues and

supporting charitable endeavours, such as a sustainability food waste project to support the local homeless community.

35. Leaders successfully promote pupils' physical health through a broad range of outdoor and sporting activities, which teach them the value of exercise. Pupils benefit from specialist coaching in sports such as hockey, cricket and rugby. They experience a wide-ranging programme of fixtures with other schools in local, regional and national competitions. As a result, pupils develop key skills such as balance, co-ordination, tactical understanding and learn the importance of fairness and sportsmanship.
36. Leaders ensure the admission and attendance registers are maintained as required by statutory guidance. Staff monitor pupils' attendance carefully and liaise promptly and supportively with parents and the local authority if their child's attendance causes concern.
37. Pupils benefit from the provision of suitable accommodation to support their medical needs. Staff qualified in first aid provide appropriate medical care to any pupils who are injured or unwell. Staff ensure the safe storage of medicines and maintain accurate records of the administration of first aid and medication.
38. Leaders' effective management of health and safety ensures the premises are suitably maintained. Leaders instigate regular fire evacuation drills, including in the boarding houses, so that pupils and staff know how to respond in an emergency. Leaders implement regular checks and maintenance, including of fire safety equipment, electrical and water systems.

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

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

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

40. Leaders and staff model respectful dialogue and promote tolerance of different backgrounds, faiths and beliefs. Pupils develop social awareness, respect for diversity and an understanding of fundamental British values through pupil-led chapel talks, PSHE lessons and form times. All pupils learn about British institutions and democracy. Pupils learn about democratic processes and visit the Houses of Parliament. They engage in political debate and participate in an inter-house Model United Nations. Pupils learn to celebrate the different cultures represented in the school and reject racism and intolerance. Pupils express their views and engage with differing perspectives confidently.
41. Pupils learn the difference between right and wrong. In science, for example, biological topics provide structured opportunities for discussion of ethical questions. Pupils' understanding of moral issues is further enhanced through a variety of societies, which encourage pupils to explore social and historical topics, such as nuclear deterrence and conflict management.
42. Leaders enable pupils to develop financial and economic understanding. Through the PSHE curriculum, pupils learn about budgeting, mortgages and interest rates. Pupils explore the world of financial services through an entry-level qualification that the school offers. A 'mini-MBA' (masters in business administration) programme provides applied learning, integrating business, economics and enterprise, culminating in presentations and evaluation. Pupils run an investment society through which they educate and inform others about the world of investments and finance. The business club and the economics and global affairs society give further access for pupils to explore financial matters such as the impact of artificial intelligence and trade wars.
43. Leaders provide a varied programme of careers guidance, including talks by visiting speakers and a careers fair. They listen to engineers, doctors and lawyers, amongst other professions, who speak about their working lives and the pathways they have taken. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about degree apprenticeships, vocational training and careers in the armed services. Pupils take part in work experience opportunities with local employers. Leaders support pupils in learning how to write a curriculum vitae and complete personal statements for university applications.
44. Staff implement a structured community action programme that enables pupils to take an active part in local community life. This includes placements in primary schools, charity shops, hospitals and a riding school for those who have disabilities. Prefects and pupil mentors display a high level of social and cultural responsibility, raising awareness of key issues and supporting charitable endeavours. For example, they lead a sustainability food waste project to support a charity working with those who are homeless. Pupils select the charities to support each year. They plan and deliver fundraising events to support the charities. In these ways, leaders promote pupils' sense of responsibility, organisation and engagement with the local community.

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. Governors know the school and understand local safeguarding risks. They provide effective oversight of safeguarding and ensure that the safeguarding team receives both appropriate challenge and support during their regular visits to the school. Leaders provide governors with regular updates and reports. Governors monitor any safeguarding trends carefully and take appropriate action promptly. They regularly review the carefully maintained records of low-level concerns, safeguarding and pastoral issues. Governors audit safeguarding procedures each year and review the safeguarding policy annually to ensure it is updated in line with statutory requirements.
47. The safeguarding team works closely and effectively with external agencies, including the local authority and children’s services. The safeguarding team maintains a visible presence across the school and boarding, supporting an inclusive and approachable safeguarding culture.
48. Staff demonstrate a clear and confident understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. Appropriately trained leaders with responsibility for safeguarding provide thorough, comprehensive training for all staff, including at induction. They support this training through regular updates, in line with statutory expectations, to keep their knowledge current.
49. Suitably trained leaders implement safer recruitment procedures effectively. No adult begins work at the school before the required pre-employment checks have been completed. However, when the inspection began, leaders did not ensure that all checks were recorded on the SCR. Leaders corrected this before the conclusion of the on-site inspection.
50. Staff teach pupils how to stay safe online during PSHE and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons. Leaders implement appropriate filtering and monitoring of the school’s internet. They review the effectiveness of these systems regularly and respond promptly to any notifications of potentially inappropriate use. Pupils can seek help and report concerns to trusted adults, directly and anonymously. If boarders have any concerns, they can talk to boarding staff, contact the independent person, who visits the school regularly, or seek other external sources of help.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Cheltenham College
Department for Education number	916/6033
Registered charity number	311720
Address	Cheltenham College Bath Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL53 7LD
Phone number	01242 265600
Email address	info@cheltenhamcollege.org
Website	www.cheltenhamcollege.org
Proprietor	The Council of Cheltenham College
Chair	Mr William Straker-Nesbitt
Headteacher	Mr Chris Townsend
Age range	13 to 19
Number of pupils	713
Number of boarding pupils	551
Date of previous inspection	25 to 27 April 2023

Information about the school

52. Cheltenham College is a co-educational day and boarding school. There is a nearby preparatory school under the same foundation with which it shares some facilities. It is a registered charity and is overseen by a board of governors known as the Council. The headteacher took up his position in April 2026.
53. The school has 11 houses, two of which are for day pupils only. There are four boarding houses for female pupils and five boarding houses for male pupils, aged 13 to 19. Pupils can board on a full-time, weekly or flexi- basis.
54. The school has identified 164 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are currently no pupils in the school who have an education, health and care plan.
55. The school has identified English as an additional language for 159 pupils.
56. The school states its aims are to equip pupils to lead purposeful and fulfilling lives by providing an excellent all-round education, which is founded on Christian principles. The school fosters intellectual curiosity, talents beyond the academic sphere, skills for a modern world, the development of spiritual, moral and aesthetic awareness within themselves and a commitment to the service of others.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 April 2026

57. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

58. 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 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.

59. 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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