

School inspection report

27 to 29 January 2026

Oxford High School GDST

Belbroughton Road

Oxford

OX2 6XA

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

Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors work closely with leaders to oversee effective leadership of the school. They ensure that leaders are consistently meeting the requirements of the Standards and actively promote the wellbeing of pupils. Policies are reviewed regularly and implemented effectively. They are made accessible to parents via the school's website.
2. Leaders fulfil the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Teaching is inclusive and does not discriminate between groups or individual pupils. Leaders ensure that staff provide work matched to pupils' needs and that pupils have access to individual support where necessary.
3. Pupils experience a curriculum that reflects their age, aptitudes and needs. Teachers prepare lessons carefully to ensure effective teaching so that pupils make good progress.
4. Well-qualified and experienced staff successfully lay the foundations for learning for children in the early years setting and ensure their wellbeing. They liaise closely with families and prepare the children effectively for transition into the senior school.
5. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculums meet pupils' needs well. The RSE programme follows statutory guidance.
6. The school provides an extensive and diverse co-curricular programme for pupils of all ages. The programme provides opportunities for pupils to experience leadership responsibilities and to develop their skills and interests.
7. A robust system is in place to track and monitor pupils' behaviour and any pastoral or bullying issues that arise. Suitable action is taken in response and pupils are provided with appropriate support.
8. The school is well maintained and all necessary checks on plant and equipment are carried out in a timely fashion. Robust health and safety practices, including for fire safety, protect the school and its community.
9. Safeguarding is managed effectively and staff are well trained. Inspectors found that the dates of some employment checks had been omitted from the single central record of appointments, but these were added during the inspection. There are effective and comprehensive systems in place to identify and manage risks to pupils.
10. Leaders support and encourage pupils to be positive citizens in British society. The curriculum teaches them about principles such as the rule of law and democracy.
11. The school provides careers education that prepares pupils effectively for their next stages.
12. Leaders' empowerment of pupils to accept responsibility and show initiative is a significant strength of the school. Pupils learn a variety of skills needed for their future lives, become more self-confident and develop their self-knowledge and self-esteem. They contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality and society more widely.

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 the single central record of appointments is maintained appropriately so that all pre-employment checks are recorded accurately and consistently.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. Leaders have clear, consistent and effective oversight of all areas of school life. Data is used constructively to inform discussions at all levels, leading to the evolution of practice to produce positive outcomes for pupils. Leaders carefully monitor the wellbeing of pupils to identify any patterns and address any issues by consulting the pupils themselves, as well as staff and parents.
14. Leaders in the early years provide an enjoyable experience for children which meets their developmental requirements. They hold regular professional development meetings with staff to be sure that children's needs are met in a suitable and nurturing environment.
15. Leaders and governors foster a respectful, supportive and inclusive community throughout the school. Teaching promotes inclusion and fairness for all pupils. Leaders ensure that staff adapt work to match pupils' needs and tailor individual support as required, which builds pupils' self-confidence and supports their good progress. A suitable and up-to-date accessibility plan is in place which addresses both access to the curriculum and the school's facilities.
16. Regular visits, reports at governor meetings, internal and external audits, pupil and staff feedback sessions and meetings with the leadership of the school enable governors to maintain effective oversight of the impact of leadership at all levels of the school. Governors supportively challenge leaders to ensure that effective and timely action is taken where necessary to make a positive difference to the wellbeing of pupils. They ensure that leaders translate the ethos and aims of the school effectively into daily practice through extensive opportunities to help pupils discover their authentic selves, take initiative and develop confidence.
17. Leaders have the required knowledge, understanding and skills to identify and manage risk. They effectively identify and mitigate risks to pupils through a wide range of risk assessments covering emotional wellbeing, physical spaces, activities, and trips and visits. Policies and risk assessments are reviewed and updated regularly. Comprehensive fire risk assessments are in place and suitably observed.
18. Governors ensure that policies are assessed regularly and updated as needed through a systematic and ongoing process to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and that the Standards are met. Leaders ensure that policies are understood and observed by staff and pupils.
19. Governors assure themselves that leaders establish effective communications and links with agencies external to the school so that issues affecting the wellbeing of pupils are acted upon promptly. Leaders review provision for any pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) annually. They provide funding local authorities with all the information they require regarding pupils' EHC plans. The local authority is also informed when any pupils leave or join the school at non-standard transition times.
20. Parents receive reports regularly about pupils' progress, attitudes and attainment. Other required information, including about the school's aims and ethos, is made available to parents, largely through the website.
21. A robust complaints policy is implemented effectively. Leaders respond appropriately to complaints in a timely manner. Suitable records are kept and leaders monitor and address patterns and trends to further the wellbeing of the pupils.

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

22. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. Leadership ensures that pupils' education and their experience of the curriculum are shaped by well-planned programmes that meet their ages, aptitudes and needs. Teaching gives pupils regular opportunities to develop vocabulary, grammar, comprehension and communication across all subjects. Mathematical and scientific education is suitably covered through the teaching of numeracy, problem-solving, logical reasoning and experimentation. Technological education is effectively integrated through the use of digital tools and the curriculum provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to explore imagination, creativity and personal expression.
24. In the early years, children learn within a stimulating environment, both in the classroom and the outdoor area. The curriculum is specifically designed to help children to acquire emotional, creative, social and physical skills. Teaching of early reading through the exploration of appropriate texts helps children to understand the relationship between letters and sounds. In mathematics, teachers employ a physical and visual approach to help the children understand connections between numbers. Physical activity, combined with writing and art activities, supports co-ordination and develops confidence.
25. In the prep and pre-prep, the well-planned, balanced and engaging curriculum enables pupils to flourish and make good progress. There are regular mental arithmetic sessions to develop calculation strategies. Teaching incorporates hands-on investigative activities to enable pupils to improve their experimental methodology and encourage them to develop their own style of creativity. Technological skills such as information management and data analysis are taught progressively through the school to enhance pupils' learning and understanding.
26. In the senior school, a varied and balanced curriculum blends academic studies with opportunities for pupils to participate in a wide range of life-enhancing and stimulating co-curricular activities that broaden and enrich their experiences. At A level, the curriculum is broad, challenging and tailored to pupils' academic interests and future goals. The school offers an extensive mix of subjects, as well as enrichment opportunities such as trips, visits and conferences, often organised and run by the pupils themselves. Teachers provide a variety of tasks that develop reading and wider critical thinking, encouraging pupils to develop extended subject knowledge and to learn independently. Pupils typically achieve above the national average at GCSE and A level.
27. Teaching is well planned and creative. Staff model mutual respect, balanced views and inclusivity. Leaders support teachers to move beyond rigid schemes of work and to adapt lessons according to pupils' needs and interests. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge, make effective use of technology, manage class time well and provide varied routes for learning. This creates a learning environment that is inspirational, caring and stimulating, enabling pupils to make good progress in their learning.
28. Teaching is inspiring and varied. Pupils, keen to learn, consistently behave well. They are inquisitive, eloquent, use problem-solving skills confidently, apply knowledge creatively and work collaboratively. Leaders ensure that pupils have the opportunity to share their ideas which contributes positively to their intellectual development, engagement and self-esteem.
29. Policies, planning, teaching and assessment effectively take account of the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those with EHC plans. Leaders identify

these needs early and provide targeted support. Teachers encourage pupils to select from a range of strategies such as transcripts for listening activities and word banks in order to develop their confidence and independence. Effective monitoring ensures that pupils who have SEND make good progress, including those in early years.

30. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) access a range of effective support, including small-group and one-to-one provision, peer mentoring, transition groups and social programmes such as 'chill and chat'. This enables pupils to make good progress with their English.
31. Teachers make effective use of assessment data to ensure that pupils are on track to achieve ambitious outcomes and that teaching is adapted to meet the needs of pupils. Teachers ensure that pupils have the time to act on and respond to feedback that they receive in order to move their learning forward. As a result, pupils feel well supported to make good progress by their skilled and approachable teachers.
32. An extensive range of recreational activities, often led by pupils, take place outside teaching time. These encourage pupils to develop their social, creative, emotional and intellectual skills. Co-curricular sport promotes teamwork and physical skills as well as enabling the pupils to enjoy being part of a stimulating, competitive and lively environment. A wide range of clubs and musical performances ensure that pupils, regardless of ability, can participate, develop confidence and explore their talents beyond the classroom.

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

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

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

34. There is a clear sense of community throughout the school, creating a culture of mutual respect and understanding, including for those who are protected under the Equality Act 2010. Pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing is effectively promoted through the calm environment, clear routines and positive, genuinely supportive relationships across the school. Pupils trust and support one another in lessons and feel secure enough to take risks in their learning without fear of failure.
35. Spiritual understanding comes from the teaching about different faiths as part of the curriculum, as well as during assemblies and PSHE debates. Opportunities to reflect on and discuss values and issues such as equality and identity enhance pupils' moral awareness.
36. Leaders ensure that the well-taught PSHE programme, which includes topics such as yoga, cooking and citizenship, is appropriately planned, expansive and thought-provoking. The programme helps pupils to learn different skills and have a chance to discuss, debate and engage fully with a variety of topics and ideas. The effective RSE programme adheres to statutory guidance and builds on topics progressively to help pupils understand the nature and diversity of relationships and promote positive attitudes that prepare pupils for adult life.
37. In PE, pupils develop skills, confidence, knowledge and understanding by participating in a range of activities. Teaching enables pupils to become creative and competitive, to learn to work with others and develop a positive attitude towards an active and healthy lifestyle. From Year 3, fixtures take place against other schools. These include hockey, netball, football, tennis, cricket, rounders and cross-country, all of which contribute to pupils' physical development, social skills and personal development.
38. The behaviour policy is clear and consistently implemented. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare and are managed effectively by staff, resulting in a calm and orderly environment that supports learning and wellbeing. In early years, the use of an emotional barometer helps children to recognise and manage feelings, as well as enabling staff to identify and support those who need additional help.
39. Anti-bullying procedures are clear and consistently applied. Pupils understand the harmful effects of bullying and sign up to the expectations and sanctions, which are accepted as part of a learning process. Pupils feel safe and confident that any concerns will be taken seriously.
40. Health and safety procedures are robust. The school site is clean and well maintained to ensure the safety and welfare of the pupils. Leaders use external audits by qualified contractors to assess health and safety provision and any issues needing attention are acted upon promptly. There is an appropriate fire risk assessment in place and effective fire safety training is provided for staff and pupils. Fire drills take place and are appropriately conducted and recorded. Procedures for vehicle movement are clear and supplemented by clear signage and road safety reminders.
41. Suitable supervision of pupils is provided during the school day with adults visible and available to support pupils. Staff in the early years are deployed so that the ratios of staff to the number of children are always appropriate.

42. Teachers in the early years provide suitably interesting and challenging activities for the children, giving them specific roles and responsibilities. Teachers have high expectations of children's behaviour and encourage them to develop in confidence as well as personally and emotionally. Children respond well to these expectations, putting forward their own ideas and rising to the challenges that are provided for them.
43. Suitable medical provision is in place to meet the needs of the pupils. Appropriately trained staff, including those in the early years who are paediatric first aiders, provide prompt care for pupils who are sick or injured. The medical room is suitably well equipped.
44. A robust system of recording admissions and attendance is in place. Lateness and absence are tracked effectively and appropriate action is taken when required, in line with statutory guidance.
45. Consistent guidance, attentive staff and clear structures ensure that the quality of pastoral care is high. This nurturing environment plays a significant role in supporting pupils' emotional resilience and positive relationships with peers and adults. Leaders give pupils meaningful opportunities to articulate their views and action change, thus developing their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-knowledge.

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

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

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

47. Leaders ensure that pupils of all ages have a secure knowledge of British values. The rule of law, democracy and political institutions are embedded within the curriculum and actively promulgated in many other areas of school life, for example through mock elections, talks by politicians and a fully democratic process of selecting school council representatives and senior prefects. The outcome for pupils is that they develop an understanding of the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination, they understand that the freedom to choose and hold other faiths and beliefs is protected in law and accept that other people having different faiths or beliefs to oneself, or having none, should be accepted and tolerated.
48. Reflecting the school's aims and ethos, an inclusive culture prevails throughout the school. Mutual respect and understanding between pupils of different cultures is authentic and supportive, as well as for people who are protected under the Equality Act 2010, enabling pupils to be themselves and feel valued. In the prep, pupils develop secure social, cultural and global awareness through experiences such as researching into international cultures. This broadens pupils' understanding of issues such as attitudes to sustainability, religion, diversity and global citizenship.
49. Preparation for life in modern Britain is embedded across the curriculum. Leaders develop pupils' knowledge of, and respect for, public institutions and services in England by inviting external speakers. For example, local police officers visit pupils in pre-prep. Assemblies include learning about rights, responsibilities and civic participation. These experiences help to foster an awareness of life in British society, encouraging pupils to reflect on how to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England.
50. Staff encourage and empower pupils to show initiative and take responsibility. This has resulted in an extensive list of activities, many of which have been initiated and are run by pupils. Pupils lead assemblies and contribute to feedback committees that inform leaders' decision-making on a variety of matters. Locally, Year 3 pupils host a clothing swap shop in school after studying sustainability in their earth studies curriculum. Pupils in Year 6 bring donations from the school to a local homeless shelter and prep school pupils engage in a collaborative project with a local care home for the elderly. Older pupils organise local charity events, make resources for refugee families, pick litter and collect food for the Oxford food hub. Pupils initiate and run sport galas and conferences on subjects such as law, medicine and linguistics. They plan these events and invite speakers and participants, which can amount to hundreds of pupils from many other schools. These opportunities help pupils to develop their social understanding and be aware of how they can contribute positively to the lives of their peers as well as of those in their local community and wider society.
51. Children in the early years access outdoor and collaborative activities, where they work through structured play and daily routines with a focus on social development. Activities which involve children taking turns or sharing resources support the development of co-operation, negotiation and teamwork.
52. Leaders ensure that pupils from a young age are encouraged to think about what careers they might follow when they are older. Year 2 pupils travel in a time rocket to the future and imagine themselves in various jobs. Careers education for pupils in Years 3 to 8 begins to expose pupils to the world of work. Guest speakers, such as a financial adviser, help pupils understand real career

pathways and how learning links to future employment, broadening perspectives and helping to break down gender stereotypes. An annual careers fair provides pupils in Years 9 to 13 with direct access to a wide range of professionals. The outcome for pupils is that they are extremely well informed about their career choices and very well supported in their applications, whether to university, direct employment or apprenticeships.

53. Leaders promote pupils' economic understanding through age-appropriate opportunities. Children in the early years run pop-up shops to become familiar with handling money. Older pupils are introduced to economic education in PSHE lessons, where topics such as budgeting at university, taxes, income and mortgages are discussed. These experiences help pupils gain an appreciation of future financial responsibility.

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

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

Safeguarding

55. Arrangements for safeguarding are rigorous and deeply embedded in school life, including in the early years. Leaders foster a robust culture where staff understand their responsibility to protect pupils. Staff are confident in their knowledge of statutory guidance and in identifying, reporting and recording concerns. This is supported by positive relationships with pupils that enable early intervention. Leaders continually review and refine safeguarding processes, ensuring training remains current, monitoring the impact of new initiatives and maintaining thorough oversight of incidents through well-maintained records so that no pupil is overlooked.
56. The school's safeguarding policies and procedures are clear, well-promoted and easy to understand for staff, pupils, parents and carers. Effective systems are in place for pupils to report any form of abuse or neglect, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously and knowing they can safely express their views.
57. Staff are well trained, knowledgeable and confident in identifying and reporting concerns promptly, including reporting low level concerns relating to adults working in the school. This creates a culture of care, vigilance and inclusion.
58. A rigorous recruitment process is in place so that suitable staff with skills appropriate to their role are appointed. The school checks new staff and other adults appropriately before they commence employment or engage with the pupils. Records are carefully maintained, though inspectors found that some dates had been omitted from the single central record. This was rectified during the inspection.
59. Clear expectations around online safety and appropriate use of technology further support pupils' welfare. Staying safe online is addressed through PSHE lessons, assemblies and year group talks. Leaders have introduced one-to-one mentoring of pupils with tutors on a termly basis in order to give every pupil an opportunity to discuss concerns about their own safety and wellbeing, including their online activity. The effective filtering and monitoring system is regularly tested and externally audited to ensure that pupils are suitably protected when accessing the internet.
60. Leaders work effectively with pupils and their families and liaise appropriately with external agencies such as social services, in line with statutory guidance. This ensures that pupils receive timely help when necessary. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding consult local authority experts in order to remain up to date on issues that affect the school's locality and its pupils.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Oxford High School GDST
Department for Education number	931/6093
Registered charity number	306983
Address	Oxford High School GDST Belbroughton Road Oxford OX2 6XA
Phone number	01865 559888
Email address	oxfordhigh@oxf.gdst.net
Website	www.oxfordhigh.gdst.net
Proprietor	Girls' Day School Trust
Chair	Mr Matt Smith
Headteacher	Mrs Marina Gardiner Legge
Age range	4 to 19
Number of pupils	756
Date of previous inspection	14 to 16 March 2023

Information about the school

62. Oxford High School is an independent day school for female pupils. Its three sites are within walking distance of each other, in the Summertown area of Oxford. The school is a member of the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), the council of which carries legal responsibility for its governance, supported by a local governing board. The school comprises four sections: early years; pre-prep and prep; the senior school and the sixth form.
63. There are 13 pupils in the early years in one Reception class.
64. The school has identified 133 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
65. The school has identified English as an additional language for 275 pupils.
66. The school states its aims are to inspire every pupil to break through their own perceived limits and thrive at all levels; to support every pupil to face their challenges with spirit, integrity and courage; to give every pupil the spirit and courage to say yes to opportunities; and to give actively to others, the school and the greater community.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

27 to 29 January 2026

67. A team of 8 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

68. 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

69. 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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