

# School inspection report

25 to 27 February 2025

## **The Oratory School**

Woodcote

Reading

Oxfordshire

RG8 0PJ

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. Leaders know their school well. They have a clear vision for school development based on effective monitoring and self-evaluation. Leaders are well supported by governors who provide support and challenge in assuring themselves that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively. The requirements of the Standards are consistently met.
2. Leaders have created a welcoming and supportive boarding environment which is successful in fostering pupils' wellbeing and personal development. Pupils respond positively to the needs of others. Pupils have appropriate knowledge of the range of people they can contact should they have any issues. Leaders ensure that staff maintain methodical boarding records. However, leaders do not ensure that these records are shared routinely across different staffing teams. On occasion, this leads to ineffective communication.
3. Most teachers use a range of strategies to support pupils' learning effectively. They identify pupils who need extra help, they adapt their lessons, and they provide timely and effective support. This includes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teaching is less successful where these strategies have not been consistently applied. Pupils of all ages benefit from a wide-ranging co-curricular programme, which is designed to support their talents and interests.
4. Leaders have put in place clear policies and procedures to ensure that behaviour is good around the school and in lessons. An effective strategy to prevent bullying is in place. Pupils' emotional, physical and mental health are successfully supported. Pupils are confident that there are adults to whom they can go with any concerns. A high proportion of pupils participate and achieve well in physical activity. Leaders have a systematic approach to the management of health and safety, including fire protocols. First aid is readily available.
5. Leaders successfully promote pupils' understanding of different cultures, lifestyles and faiths. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives through a knowledge of public institutions. There is a suitable programme of careers education in place. Boarders take an appropriate level of responsibility for the success of the boarding houses. The curriculum which develops pupils' economic awareness is not fully developed for the oldest pupils. Older pupils do not develop a full understanding about managing their finances as they move into adulthood.
6. Governors review safeguarding practices rigorously at the school. Staff use the school's procedures for reporting concerns. Leaders carry out recruitment checks correctly, and these are recorded appropriately. Pupils know how to keep safe, including online.

## 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:

- fully embed the systematic sharing of records in boarding to ensure all staff have relevant information related to pupils' welfare, as required
- develop the small amount of teaching that is not supporting pupils to learn effectively
- ensure older pupils are provided with opportunities to develop their understanding about managing their own finances as they move into adulthood.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Leaders and managers have the required knowledge and skills and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, including actively promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Governors assure themselves that the Standards are met through their effective scrutiny and monitoring of the school's practice and procedures. Their understanding of the school is also informed through comprehensive reports. They provide appropriate challenge and support to leaders.
8. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for further development of the school and consider carefully the impact their actions have on pupils' wellbeing and success. They are informed by methodical and detailed self-evaluation.
9. New pupils and boarders are supported to settle in quickly and understand the school's expectations and procedures. Boarding routines and practice are well communicated to pupils. Boarders understand and are confident to ask questions or raise any concerns they have. Appropriate records are maintained in boarding which ensure that pupils' welfare is suitably managed and monitored. However, leaders do not ensure that these records are shared routinely across different staffing teams. On occasion, this leads to ineffective communication between staff.
10. Leaders manage any parental complaints appropriately and keep thorough records of these and any actions taken by the school in response. Complaints are dealt with within the timeframes stated in the school's policy. Leaders monitor and address any patterns of concerns effectively.
11. Parents receive reports regularly about pupils' progress and attainment. Regular parent consultation evenings are held. All other required information, including the school's aims and ethos, is made available to parents, largely through the school's informative website. There are currently no pupils for whom the school receives additional funding from the local authority.
12. Leaders have a comprehensive and robust approach to risk management. An appropriate critical incident plan is in place. Leaders have an effective understanding of physical, welfare and safeguarding risks and respond with urgency and diligence to areas of risk. Risk assessments identify potential risks thoroughly and detail appropriate steps taken to reduce or remove these. Leaders systematically monitor risk assessments to check their continued effectiveness.
13. Leaders have developed a detailed accessibility plan that includes actions to facilitate the access to the premises for those with a disability. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act (2010). Pupils' needs are well considered, ensuring that pupils access the curriculum and the school's facilities.

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

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

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

15. Leaders provide a varied and broad curriculum, through which pupils develop a wide range of skills, knowledge and qualifications. Leaders prioritise the range of subjects on offer to pupils, including a well-organised creative curriculum in music, drama and art, as well as the opportunity to study French, Latin and Spanish. Leaders ensure academic departments are well resourced. Teachers ensure that pupils make effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) in most lessons.
16. Most teachers use a range of strategies to enthuse and engage pupils in their learning. They explain tasks clearly, they check on how well pupils are learning, they adapt lessons to support pupils who need extra support or who are ready to apply their learning in more complex ways. They use feedback to help pupils understand how to improve their understanding. However, some teachers are not using strategies effectively to support pupils to make the progress of which they are capable. In these lessons, some pupils find work too hard or too easy.
17. Pupils who have SEND are identified in a timely and effective manner. Leaders identify appropriate strategies for supporting pupils in lessons which are documented in individual learning plans. The plans are shared with teaching staff to enable teachers to provide support. Where these strategies are successfully implemented, pupils make good progress. However, this is not the case in some lessons.
18. The school provides targeted support for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Pupils are very well supported in lessons, and where needed, through additional intervention. Pupils make progress in their reading and literacy, particularly in their writing skills, through the structured guidance provided by their teachers.
19. Leaders have designed an assessment framework that enables them to check on pupils' learning regularly. Pupils are well informed of their progress and are provided with additional help when needed. Pupils make good progress across a range of subjects including maths, science and English. They also develop their technological skills and knowledge in lessons. Most achieve well in their GCSE and A-level qualifications.
20. Leaders set aside protected time for boarders in the evenings for prep where everybody is working, and tutors are supervising and available to support academic work. This helps these pupils make progress academically and to learn to be self-motivated and develop independent study skills.
21. The school provides a programme of recreation activities that spans across sport, performing arts and cultural societies. Leaders aim to cater for a wide variety of interests. Boarders benefit from local trips during the evenings and at weekends. Consequently, pupils broaden and develop their emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills.

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

**22. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

23. Leaders set out clear principles of respect for others. Daily prayers in the form room and boarding houses, assemblies and chapel services celebrate a range of different faiths and beliefs. There are highly positive relationships between pupils and staff. As a result, pupils feel safe, secure and happy.
24. Leaders set high expectations for the behaviour of pupils. Leaders are knowledgeable, skilled, well-trained and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. There are robust systems to monitor and record any issues of behaviour or bullying. Issues are well managed and monitored. Staff follow agreed policies and take effective action where necessary. Pupils are confident that any issues raised are swiftly and appropriately managed. Bullying is rare. Pupils behave very well in lessons, in social times and in boarding.
25. There is a high quality PSHE curriculum which is taught by form tutors and is monitored by senior leaders. The PSHE curriculum includes the RSE statutory content in an age-appropriate way, including topics related to same-sex relationships, puberty, healthy living and relationships, contraception and coercive control. The PSHE programme is supported by school and house assemblies. Pupils learn to stay physically and mentally healthy as well as how to keep themselves safe, including when online.
26. Physical education is part of the core curriculum. Pupils are given a range of opportunities to engage in activities to keep themselves fit and healthy, exercise, and take part in competitive sport. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to take part in sports as part of a team and participate in a wide range of sports. There are lots of wider opportunities on offer to pupils as well, such as in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), where many pupils develop resilience, tenacity, and leadership skills.
27. The broad curriculum, wide range of co-curricular opportunities and opportunities for leadership and for pupils to express themselves enable pupils to develop self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. Pupils feel respected and cared for by teachers which supports their personal development. Pupils have many opportunities to take on responsibility and develop their leadership skills. For example, leaders ensure that prefects are given wide-ranging and highly responsible roles and responsibilities. Prefects are high quality role models for pupils and boarders.
28. The registers of admission and attendance are maintained in accordance with the statutory requirements. Attendance is carefully monitored. The local authority is notified when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
29. Leaders manage health and safety issues effectively, including those related to fire safety. The health and safety committee evaluates the actions needed to mitigate risks. Clear and effective digital systems are in place and are used to log, track and monitor maintenance requirements to ensure pupil safety is prioritised. Measures are taken to reduce the risk of harm.
30. Boarding accommodation is safe, clean and well equipped. There is a regular maintenance system that ensures any issues are swiftly dealt with. Experienced house staff and tutor teams ensure that boarders are cared for and carefully supervised. The houses have a sense of calmness, respect and purposefulness away from the business of school life. Boarders' wellbeing is actively promoted.

31. Leaders take appropriate steps to ensure the site is well maintained including a rolling programme of upgrades to older facilities. Site security is very well managed. Leaders ensure appropriate supervision of pupils and boarders is in place in the school and the boarding houses.
32. The school's health centre co-ordinates high quality medical care and first aid provision in the school and boarding provision. First aid provision is adapted to provide cover for sports fixtures that vary with the weather or the type of sport so that pupils are kept healthy and safe.

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

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



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

34. Leaders promote an understanding of and respect for those of different faiths, beliefs and lifestyles. Pupils develop their understanding through lessons, assemblies and a range of celebrations. The assembly programme, along with the PSHE programme, covers important topics such as prejudice and the Equality Act. For example, assemblies celebrate different cultures, such as Chinese New Year. Leaders prioritise events such as Black History Month. Pupils discuss important topics such as antisemitism with maturity and thoughtfulness. Consequently, pupils have respect for others.
35. Pupils have a secure understanding of values such as democracy. Teaching ensures that pupils are well informed, balanced, empathetic and confident in discussions. For example, recent elections and current affairs have been used by teachers to lead discussions around democracy. Pupils engage in the democratic process through participation in mock elections. The school council meets weekly where pupils can raise issues with leaders on topics that are important to them.
36. Leaders ensure that pupils understand the importance of the rule of law. Adults encourage pupils to understand important public roles and establishments such as the police, judges and courts. Leaders have set out a clear ethos for understanding right from wrong. This is promoted through house assemblies and the ethos of the school. As a result, pupils feel there is a culture of making the right decisions.
37. Leaders provide pupils with a wide-ranging and well-planned curriculum related to careers education. This curriculum is supported by independent careers information, advice and guidance to support pupils to make decisions in their best interests. Younger pupils are well supported to make decisions about subject options. As they get older, pupils are well supported to make informed decisions about their future decisions related to further education, training or employment. This includes a good range of support for pupils wishing to apply for university, apprenticeship or work.
38. Leaders provide pupils with a curriculum related to economic education. Younger pupils learn in an age-appropriate way topics such as the risks associated with gambling, while older pupils learn about budgeting and taxation. However, the oldest pupils do not receive sufficient information about managing their finances as they move into adulthood.
39. Boarding staff ensure that pupils have many opportunities to mix with others, including regular joint activities and organised visits over the weekend. Boarders understand what it means to be part of a boarding community and the concept of putting others first. Clear boarding expectations, which include the need for pupils to do their own laundry, equip boarders with skills for life through them learning how to accept responsibility. The integration of day pupils within the boarding houses promotes social cohesion amongst pupils.
40. Leaders encourage pupils to actively seek ways to serve others. They provide a wide range of opportunities for pupils to do this within school and in the local community. Pupils collect for local foodbanks and organise charitable activities. Voluntary work, for example in local schools, develops pupils' respect for others and their awareness of responsibility as they get older. For example, pupils who speak EAL run language classes for local primary pupils, enabling them to engage with the local community in a meaningful way.

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

**41. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

42. Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders are well trained and knowledgeable. They are aware of the contextual risks and challenges facing pupils beyond the school, including risks relating to radicalisation and extremism. Leaders have established appropriate systems and procedures to safeguard pupils. There is an appropriate safeguarding policy on the school website that reflects the requirements of current statutory guidance.
43. Safeguarding training for staff is thorough, regular and in line with local and national requirements, including a suitable induction process for new staff. Leaders check on staff's understanding of their training, for example through quizzes and questionnaires. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and report concerns. These include any concerns that they have about adults working with pupils.
44. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities respond promptly and appropriately to any safeguarding concerns that arise. They consult with external safeguarding partners and refer safeguarding concerns to them when appropriate. Leaders keep suitable records of safeguarding concerns and the decisions and actions taken in response to these.
45. Governors maintain an effective overview of leaders' work to safeguard pupils. All governors undertake regular safeguarding training and are knowledgeable and skilled in their role. Governors conduct a range of activities to ensure that all reasonable action is taken to keep pupils safe. For example, governors conduct a detailed termly review of safeguarding practice at the school. They speak to pupils and staff and review the actions that leaders take.
46. Leaders provide several ways for pupils to raise any concerns that they might have. Pupils know who they can go to should they have any concerns. The availability and the role of the school's independent person are known to boarders. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Suitable internet filtering and monitoring procedures are in place which safeguard online activities in the school and boarding houses. These systems are monitored daily, regularly tested and externally audited.
47. Leaders ensure that all appropriate recruitment checks on adults who work with pupils or boarders are made in a timely manner and accurately recorded in a suitable single central record of appointments. Staff files are well organised.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	The Oratory School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	931/6034
<b>Registered charity number</b>	309112
<b>Address</b>	The Oratory School Woodcote Reading Oxfordshire RG8 0PJ
<b>Phone number</b>	01491 683500
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@oratory.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.oratory.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Oratory Schools Association
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Frank Gargent
<b>Acting Headteacher</b>	Mr Matthew Fogg
<b>Age range</b>	11 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	343
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	123
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	2 to 5 November 2021

## Information about the school

49. The Oratory School is an independent day and boarding school near Reading. Founded as a single sex school for male pupils in 1859, it has been registered as a co-educational school since September 2020. The school is governed by the Oratory Schools Association, a registered charity. It is a Roman Catholic school that admits pupils from various or no faiths. Leaders' work is overseen by a board of governors. The Acting Headteacher was appointed in January 2025.
50. Boarders are accommodated in five boarding houses, on the same site as the main school buildings: one for female pupils aged 11 to 18, one for male pupils aged 11 to 13 and three for male pupils aged 13 to 18.
51. The school has identified 79 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
52. English is an additional language for 66 pupils.
53. The school states its aims are to respect each pupil as an individual and to give them the confidence and self-esteem to develop their talents to the full. It seeks to develop the whole person intellectually, morally, socially, spiritually, aesthetically and physically, in partnership with parents. It aims to provide a good academic education to as many learners as possible and to actively promote values of compassion, service, stillness, self-reflection and a sense of wonder.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

25 to 27 February 2025

54. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

55. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and house assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair of 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.

56. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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