

School inspection report

21 to 23 April 2026

Wychwood School

72 – 74 Banbury Road

Oxford

OX2 6JR

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 and other leaders work together effectively to ensure that the Standards, including the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (NMS), are met consistently. Directors use committees and external reviews to maintain high standards. The proprietor ensures that the senior team has the expertise to manage school operations. Leaders have successfully managed the transition to co-education since the last inspection.
2. Effective self-evaluation underpins leaders' improvement actions. This includes thorough risk management, attendance monitoring and reporting to local authorities. Productive partnerships with parents and agencies ensure accountability. The co-ordinated oversight of leaders' and teachers' work ensures that pupils are secure, known as individuals and well supported.
3. Leaders design a broad curriculum. This prepares pupils effectively for the next stage of their education. Specialist teachers enable pupils to make good progress across subject areas. In the sixth form, pupils benefit from academic challenge that encourages pupils to think deeply about their learning. Leaders use information from baseline checks on learning and purposeful assessment systems to monitor academic outcomes. They implement timely interventions when needed. Pupils achieve well in public examinations from their starting points and are successful in gaining university places.
4. Teachers have expert subject knowledge. They form positive relationships with pupils. This creates a calm learning environment. Teachers make adjustment to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This ensures that all pupils have access to the curriculum. When teachers do not plan lessons well, pupils' learning slows. In the most successful lessons, carefully planned tasks engage pupils in learning. Pupils collaborate effectively, and they make good progress. Leaders provide a varied programme of recreational and boarding activities. These support pupils' social development effectively. Leaders organise treasure hunts for pupils, for example, and give them access to the school gym at specific times with staff supervision.
5. Leaders prioritise pupils' wellbeing through a nurturing ethos. This successfully balances individual care with pupils' physical development, as well as support for their mental health and wellbeing. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculums are well structured. These programmes provide pupils with age-appropriate knowledge to manage their own mental health. Pupils develop moral and spiritual understanding through creative expression and supportive peer relationships. High levels of physical activity and inclusive adaptations, such as modifications to rowing boats, help all pupils to understand how to make healthy lifestyle choices.
6. The school is a safe and respectful environment where pupils behave well. They follow clear expectations consistently. Leaders oversee effective management of health and safety, robust first aid arrangements and careful monitoring of attendance. Boarding provision meets all regulatory standards included in the NMS. Effective pastoral oversight and early identification of needs ensure that all pupils, including those in boarding, are well supported to develop independence and progress well.
7. Leaders prioritise social responsibility, to ensure that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Fundamental British values and respect for people who are protected under the Equality Act

2010 are woven into the school's inclusive culture. Through democratic participation in the student council, pupils learn to take initiative and gain a genuine sense of agency. They contribute meaningfully to the wider community. This means they gain a compassionate understanding of local social and economic challenges. Pupils become principled individuals who show appreciation for others.

8. Leaders maintain a robust safeguarding culture. Systematic recording helps the early identification of risks. However, leaders do not consistently follow up all referrals or record the rationale for the decisions they take.

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:

- consistently follow up promptly when referrals are made to external agencies, and ensure that detailed information is recorded about the decisions taken
- ensure that lessons are consistently well planned to meet pupils' needs and interests so that all pupils engage fully in their learning and achieve their potential.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. The governing body provides effective oversight through a robust committee structure. Directors make regular use of external audits to ensure that all relevant Standards are consistently met, including the NMS. The proprietor ensures that leaders and managers possess the expertise required for their roles. Consequently, leaders have the skills necessary to provide a safe, ambitious and nurturing environment for pupils.
10. Since the last inspection, leaders have successfully integrated male pupils into the school and the boarding house. Directors closely monitor all aspects of school life. This includes a rigorous focus on pupils' academic progress. Leaders ensure that pupils' wellbeing remains at the heart of the school's strategic planning. They create a culture that successfully balances academic ambition with individual care. As a result, pupils are known by staff as individuals and feel secure in their development.
11. Leaders ensure that the school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The school buildings pose structural challenges to accessibility. In response, leaders implement bespoke personal emergency evacuation plans. They plan effectively for reasonable adjustments to the school site. The school prioritises scheduling classes on the ground floor, for example, for any student with mobility issues where lifts are not feasible. Leaders ensure that teaching does not promote partisan views or discriminate against those people who are protected under the Equality Act 2010.
12. Leaders fulfil their statutory responsibilities regarding pupils' records and reporting to external bodies. The school reports to the local authority regarding the annual review of education, health and care plans (EHC plans). Leaders ensure that funds are appropriately allocated to support pupils with additional needs. They inform the local authority about any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition times. Leaders monitor attendance data to investigate patterns of absence. This enables leaders to provide timely support to families.
13. The school's aims and ethos are promoted effectively and work well in practice. The 'extension elective scheme' provides breadth to the curriculum for pupils. It gives them opportunities to widen their skills and interests. Leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness through systematic self-evaluation. They respond to any findings with prompt action.
14. Leaders assess risk in a systematic and transparent manner. The proprietor ensures that leaders and managers have the appropriate skills and understanding to identify, manage and reduce risks. This includes rigorous boarding risk assessments, supervised use of kitchen equipment and the careful vetting of residential staff. Leaders identify and guard against harder-to-spot risks, such as contextual safeguarding issues. Leaders carry out a detailed 'Prevent' risk assessment to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Staff are alert to these risks through regular training.
15. The effective links that leaders establish with other agencies promote and benefit pupils' wellbeing, including for boarders. Leaders provide regular, detailed reports to parents on their child's progress and effort. They ensure that appropriate information is made available to parents and the wider community.
16. Leaders maintain a clear complaints policy and procedures. They adhere consistently to the timelines indicated. Leaders accurately record the number of complaints at the formal stage and ensure that the composition of any Stage 3 panel includes independent members. Concerns raised

by boarders are reviewed to ensure that their specific needs are met. Leaders analyse records of complaints and share these with directors. This helps leaders at all levels to identify and address any underlying patterns.

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

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders design and plan the curriculum carefully. This enables pupils to develop skills across linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, and aesthetic and creative areas. Leaders provide a combination of specialist expertise and personalised support. This ensures that pupils make good progress in the core subjects, such as in English and mathematics. In mathematics, leaders adjust the composition of teaching groups in Year 9 to narrow ability ranges. Teachers focus on exam techniques and real-time feedback via online assessment for pupils in Year 11. In English, teachers use guided discussions and collaborative activities. Leaders use annual departmental reviews and the school's education development plan to secure changes to the curriculum. For example, leaders introduce new electives courses to strengthen pupils' understanding of their own learning. Leaders in the sixth form provide a broad programme of study that prepares pupils effectively for higher education. Pupils choose from a wide range of A-level subjects. Specialist teaching encourages independent research and critical thinking. The curriculum is supplemented by the 'Oxford Pearl' and 'Wigfield Digby' lecture series. These opportunities support pupils to learn beyond the standard curriculum.
19. Teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge effectively. Pupils in Year 10, for example, confidently annotate tectonic processes in geography lessons. Pupils in Year 12 religious studies lessons demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of utilitarianism. Teachers in the creative arts encourage pupils to produce ambitious work. Teachers have expert subject knowledge. This gives pupils confidence in their learning and leads to successful university placements in a range of fields. Teachers manage class time well. Pupils engage productively in lessons. They work together readily to solve problems. Peer-to-peer and pupil-teacher relationships are mutually supportive and trusting. This creates a calm and purposeful working atmosphere. Teachers use a range of good-quality resources. Where lessons are well planned to meet pupils' needs and interests, pupils acquire new knowledge rapidly. Where this is not the case, pupils' interest is not consistently sustained and progress slows. In these lessons, pupils do not consistently achieve well.
20. Assessment builds from low-stakes unit tests to formal, scheduled whole-school assessment points as pupils move through the school. This helps leaders to compile a clear picture of individual pupils' progress. Across the curriculum, teachers use the school's agreed system for assessing pupils' work consistently well. Assessment routines are purposeful. Pupils understand their target grades and the specific next steps required to reach them. Leaders check pupils' ability when they join the school to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum over time. They monitor pupils' performance against this information and implement targeted interventions if pupils' progress falls below expectations. Pupils perform well at GCSE and A level. Pupils make particularly good progress in the creative arts.
21. Leaders ensure that teachers take full account of pupils' ages, aptitudes and needs. Leaders provide robust support for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Leaders assess the English proficiency of pupils on arrival. Teachers provide regular Saturday lessons and targeted interventions so that pupils can access the curriculum successfully. As required, teachers make effective use of translation software and bilingual materials in lessons.
22. Leaders identify pupils who have SEND. They understand these pupils' needs. Teachers provide effective support. This means that pupils who have SEND make good progress.

23. Leaders provide a broad programme of recreational activities outside teaching time, including for boarders. This ranges from sports, music, drama and the 'Wych Factor' production. In the evenings, pupils who board engage in house-based activities such as snack-making sessions or film nights. Leaders give access to the gym at specific times under staff supervision. At weekends, leaders arrange a diverse range of trips to local attractions. These include Oxford museums, the cinema, skating and Christmas markets. Leaders also permit boarders to go shopping in Oxford under specific supervisory conditions. Boarders develop social and recreational skills within a supportive community.
24. For pupils above compulsory school age, the quality of the wider curriculum is appropriate to their needs. Pupils, for example, take part in courses focused on life and economic skills for university. Boarding staff and tutors know the pupils well. They secure trusting relationships. This enables staff to identify any academic or pastoral concerns early. Boarders feel comfortable and well supported, which allows them to concentrate on their studies.

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

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

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

26. Leaders at Wychwood School consistently promote pupils' wellbeing. They create an ethos rooted in a 'family atmosphere'. This balances academic excellence with individual care. Pupils feel known, confident and able to participate fully in school life. Leaders give pupils opportunities to gain moral understanding within and outside the curriculum. The school productions, as well as music and drama lessons, for example, give pupils the opportunity to support each other. Older pupils assist younger peers with their pieces by giving feedback on their performances. This impacts positively on pupils' self-esteem, confidence and technique. Pupils who are new to the school describe the environment as warm and welcoming.
27. Pupils develop a deep appreciation for the non-material aspects of life in a school culture that promotes this well. Pupils thrive, for example, both in and out of formal lesson times in the creative arts department. Teachers encourage pupils to explore complex themes and express personal feelings through their work. Through a project on butterflies, for example, pupils readily reflect on the fragility and wonder of life. Pupils analyse the underlying form and colour demonstrated in pieces of art.
28. Leaders design the PSHE curriculum to follow a spiral model. This revisits previous learning at each stage. Teachers revisit health and relationship themes, for example, in an age-appropriate manner as pupils mature. Leaders ensure the curriculum changes in a way to support pupils using relevant themes in different year groups. In a Year 11 lesson on stress management, for example, pupils are encouraged to be active, talk to friends and to perform acts of kindness. Pupils are articulate and confident in these discussions. They demonstrate a clear understanding of how to maintain their own mental wellbeing.
29. RSE is a discrete part of the PSHE curriculum. Potentially sensitive issues, including consent and healthy relationships, are covered in a timely and appropriate way. Leaders help pupils to gain the knowledge they need for adult life. Leaders engage with parents at the start of each year to outline the curriculum.
30. Leaders design the curriculum to promote the importance of physical health. Leaders provide pupils up to Year 11 with three hours of physical education (PE) weekly. Pupils in the Sixth Form receive two mandatory hours of PE. Leaders adapt the curriculum so that all pupils have access to activities. Modified rowing boats allow all pupils to participate alongside their peers. Leaders give pupils opportunities to engage in competitive sports. Pupils take part in national competitions in rugby sevens and racket sports. Leaders address broader aspects of a healthy lifestyle, including diet, nutrition, and sleep through the assembly programme and the electives scheme. Elective opportunities which focus on sports leadership allow pupils to explore physical activity beyond traditional team games. Leaders help pupils to learn which forms of movement they enjoy. Pupils are taught to make healthy life choices.
31. Pupils behave well and treat each other with respect. Leaders remove mobile phones from pupils at the start of the day. Pupils understand the rules and follow them. Since the last inspection, the school has admitted male pupils. Leaders act decisively regarding any incidents of derogatory language. Leaders implement an effective anti-bullying strategy. Pupils are positive that bullying is rare and, should it occur, they are confident it would be dealt with promptly and sensitively.

Teachers supervise pupils out of lessons. Pupils develop the independence necessary for their future lives.

32. Leaders manage health and safety effectively. The site is secure. Compliance checks for fire safety, gas and electrical testing are completed on schedule. Leaders respond swiftly to any urgent findings. The arrangements for first aid are robust. All school trips are equipped with duty phones and fully stocked first aid bags. Staff are well trained in first aid and the administration of medication. They maintain accurate and up-to-date medical records. For boarders, access to a local GP and a dedicated sick bay helps meet their health needs promptly.
33. Leaders ensure that the arrangements for boarding meet all the NMS. Pupils value the extra dinner provisions, where the kitchen provides bread, eggs and milk on request, and the sense of a close-knit boarding community. Leaders provide a range of well-considered recreational activities for boarders. These range from sessions in which boarders make snacks together in the evening to weekend trips to local Oxford museums. Leaders closely monitor the safety of those who board. Night-time fire drills, for example, are conducted each term and resident staff are trained as fire wardens. Boarders have access to a counsellor and an independent listener. Pupils who board express high levels of satisfaction, describing their rooms as clean and comfortable.
34. Leaders ensure that statutory registrations are taken accurately and punctually each morning and afternoon. Leaders analyse attendance data to monitor patterns and investigate absences. Unauthorised absences are followed up quickly. The school maintains regular contact with the local authority as required, including when pupils arrive or leave the school at non-standard times. Leaders identify pupils' emerging needs early. This supports pupils' progress effectively.

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

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

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

36. Leaders promote respect, responsibility and active citizenship in school. This is further supported by the school's 'family atmosphere'. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern British society. They develop into principled and thoughtful individuals. Leaders actively promote fundamental British values through a combination of the formal curriculum, assemblies and the school's inclusive ethos. Leaders help pupils gain a deep understanding of different identities and protected characteristics. The student-led Pride Club, for example, meets weekly to promote mutual respect and tolerance. Leaders encourage pupils from a range of backgrounds to mix. Pupils are respectful and behave well. Leaders use student surveys and sociograms to monitor pupils' behaviour. This ensures that any rare instances of poor behaviour are addressed through targeted workshops and one-to-one interventions.
37. The student council is a central feature of school life. Leaders provide the opportunity for pupils to play their part in the work of the council. Consequently, pupils develop a sophisticated understanding of democratic processes and the rule of law. Representatives from each year group are democratically elected. This provides pupils with a genuine sense of agency. Through the council, pupils propose and implement changes to school life. Following a pupil proposal for a sandwich station, new catering options are now made available. Pupils learn to engage in polite, constructive dialogue with leaders. In so doing, pupils learn to respect the institutions that govern their community. Leaders further encourage responsibility in pupils through the appointment of older pupils as 'citizens' or 'head councillors'. These pupils are trained to take some responsibility for the younger pupils' pastoral needs. Year 11 pupils act as mentors to help Year 7 pupils as they integrate into the boarding house.
38. Leaders put in place an extensive social action programme. Through engagement in this, pupils show initiative and contribute positively to the wider community. As part of the electives programme, pupils demonstrate active community compassion. Pupils prepare sandwiches every week for a local homeless charity. In doing so, they gain an active understanding of the social and economic challenges faced by others. Leaders give pupils opportunities to host events such as the 'STEAM Ahead' fair and 'Wychwood Inspires' Saturdays. Leaders encourage pupils to organise and run activities for local primary school children. Pupils learn the skills of initiative and leadership. They learn the importance of environmental responsibility by running the school's eco-club.
39. Leaders provide a clear and coherent programme of economic education. Pupils take part in enterprise activities in the lower school and progress to advanced financial literacy in the sixth form. In Year 8, pupils take part in the '£5 Challenge'. They learn about basic budgeting, marketing and how to put forward their ideas. In the 'Dragon's Den' elective, Year 9 pupils learn to justify financial decisions to external judges. This introduces them to real-world expectations and supports the development of their oracy. Pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 explore personal finance topics such as debt, credit, taxation and payslips. This helps pupils to develop practical knowledge directly relevant to adult life. Leaders give pupils in the sixth form the opportunity to take part in an entrepreneurial programme. Pupils extend their understanding of strategic financial planning and leadership. They learn, for example, how to launch a business to compost food waste.
40. Leaders map careers guidance against nationally recognised benchmarks. This ensures pupils receive structured, age-appropriate guidance. Leaders provide a coherent careers curriculum delivered

through discrete timetabled careers lessons. They support pupils with their choices through personalised one-to-one guidance with their progress tutors. Pupils of all ages benefit from encounters with a range of external professions. Recent guest speakers include, for example, a professional meteorologist and professional musicians. Pupils gain an understanding of the world of work. Leaders support pupils to make good choices. The majority of pupils secure places on their first-choice university courses.

41. Leaders actively promote the principles of right and wrong. They encourage pupils to distinguish these clearly and to respect the civil and criminal laws of England. The rewards and sanctions system is well understood by pupils and applied consistently by staff. Pupils take pride in their community. They frequently show appreciation for the efforts of others. For example, pupils take the opportunity to thank staff for school trips or production rehearsals through the school council. Leaders help pupils to acquire a respect for public institutions and services through the PSHE programme and the discussion of current affairs. Pupils develop a clear sense of moral values. They are well prepared to be principled and compassionate members of modern British society.

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

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

Safeguarding

43. Leaders have established a robust and strategic culture of safeguarding. This culture is characterised by regular, effective training and the vigilance of adults working in the school. It is fostered by the school's 'family atmosphere' in which all pupils are known individually. This helps staff identify needs early. Pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing are prioritised.
44. Staff safeguarding training is comprehensive and frequent. It begins with a rigorous induction process. Updates continue throughout the year in the form of twilight training sessions and reminders. Annual training is delivered to all adults working in the school. The impact of this training is evident in staff practice. Staff are alert to contextual risks in the local area. Staff understand the specific vulnerabilities of pupils who have SEND. Leaders maintain the impact of training through 'Safeguarding Questions of the Week'. They also use 'SEND Spotlights' in weekly staff newsletters. This helps safety remain at the forefront of the minds of all staff.
45. Arrangements to identify and report concerns are secure and systematic. Leaders use an electronic system to record incidents. They use this data to monitor patterns. Staff understand how to raise concerns and understand their responsibilities. A comprehensive log is maintained of low-level concerns. These include self-referrals.
46. Pupils know how to raise concerns. They do this through the completion of anonymous surveys. Leaders monitor the results of wellbeing surveys carefully. Pupils are confident that staff are approachable and will act swiftly. Older pupils, acting as 'citizens', advocate for younger peers. Leaders spot patterns in behaviour and act when needed in response to identified concerns.
47. Leaders work effectively with external partnerships. They participate in regular multi-agency reviews. However, leaders do not consistently follow up with external agencies when referrals are made. They do not always record the rationale for any decisions they take in response to identified safeguarding risks.
48. Leaders demonstrate understanding of statutory thresholds for escalating safeguarding concerns. They make timely referrals to local authorities. Members of the safeguarding team have appropriate time given to enable them to carry out their roles. They receive all relevant digital alerts. This helps vulnerable pupils receive coordinated support.
49. Recruitment procedures are robust. Leaders systematically and meticulously record checks on the single central record (SCR). Senior staff are trained in safer recruitment. The head or director of operations is involved in every staff recruitment interview. Staff files are detailed. All the required vetting checks are completed before an adult starts work. Leaders implement and regularly review detailed risk assessments for any administrative gaps. This ensures pupil safety is not compromised.
50. Pupils are taught effectively to keep themselves safe through annual updates on online safety. The school meets standards for filtering and monitoring through real-time online systems. Leaders have taken decisive steps to manage digital risks by implementing a strict mobile phone policy where phones are handed in during the school day. This has reduced the risks associated with unsupervised internet access.

51. Safeguarding in boarding is secure. Risks are systematically managed, with clear delineations between staff and pupil accommodation. Boarders have access to an independent person and a counsellor.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

52. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Wychwood School
Department for Education number	931/6068
Address	Wychwood School 72 – 74 Banbury Road Oxford Oxfordshire OX2 6JR
Phone number	01865 557976
Email address	admissions@wychwoodschool.org
Website	www.wychwoodschool.org
Proprietor	Wychwood School (Oxford) Limited
Chair	Mr Simon Tyrrell
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Evans
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	143
Number of boarding pupils	17
Date of previous inspection	21 June 2023

Information about the school

53. Wychwood School is a co-educational day and boarding school located in North Oxford, Oxfordshire, for pupils aged 11 to 18. The school consists of a senior school which includes a sixth form. The school is overseen by a board of directors. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of proprietors was appointed in June 2024.
54. Boarding is accommodated in one boarding house, called 'The House' located in the main school. Boarding is available for boys and girls from ages 11 to 18.
55. The school has identified 22 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
56. The school has identified English as an additional language for eleven pupils.
57. The school states its aims are to produce kind young people with integrity, a sense of self-worth and independence of thought, able to leave school with the wisdom and courage to find their place and space in the world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

21 to 23 April 2026

58. A team of 4 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

59. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- discussions with the chair of the board of directors
- 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.

60. 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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