

School inspection report

21 to 23 April 2026

Bolton School Girls' Division

Chorley New Road

Bolton

BL1 4PB

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 are well informed about all areas of school life. Through frequent meetings and a suitable committee structure, they ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities to meet the Standards consistently.
2. Governors and leaders implement a comprehensive and systematic approach to risk assessment. This is underpinned by a clear policy and effective oversight from a central health and safety committee.
3. Leaders have planned a balanced curriculum with a broad range of subjects at GCSE and A level. It covers all required areas of learning effectively and facilitates a wide range of choices. An extensive choice of enrichment courses complements A-level study in the sixth form. Pupils in the junior and senior schools make good progress across the curriculum.
4. The junior school's creative thinking curriculum is particularly effective in enabling pupils to make connections across subjects and engage in independent enquiry. Pupils present outcomes in authentic ways, including podcasts and curated exhibitions. The creative thinking curriculum allows learners to immerse themselves in topics, extending their knowledge from different angles, leading to high levels of attainment. It is a significant strength of the school.
5. Teachers have appropriate subject knowledge. Most lessons are well planned to ensure that pupils make good progress. However, within some lessons, teaching is less well matched to pupils' needs and prior attainment.
6. Leaders ensure that the management of health and safety is carried out to a high standard. Buildings and grounds are well maintained. Frequent monitoring takes place. Staff take a proactive approach in which future needs are anticipated. This is underpinned by effective and detailed record-keeping. Staff respond efficiently to any health and safety need identified through internal checks and implement any recommendations by external auditors promptly.
7. Pupils receive effective and age-appropriate careers education and advice for higher education and life beyond school.
8. Leaders provide pupils with a range of opportunities to contribute to the community. Pupils engage in volunteering in high numbers and recognise the value of service to others.
9. Opportunities for pupils to link their learning to real-life situations are embedded across the curriculum. Projects linked to global themes enable pupils to understand social, economic and environmental issues. Pupils demonstrate increasing independence, self-awareness and the ability to make informed decisions about their futures.
10. There is a robust culture of safeguarding across the school. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Leaders ensure that communication about safeguarding is efficient. The safeguarding team works effectively with teachers who deliver the school's 'THRIVE' programme to support pupils, as needed. THRIVE stands for tenacity, health, resilience, individuality, value and equality.

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:

- improve the consistency of teaching, ensuring that all lessons meet the needs of all pupils.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders and governors ensure that the promotion of pupils' wellbeing is at the heart of the school's provision. Leaders have the appropriate knowledge and skills to manage a setting in which all aspects of pupils' wellbeing are supported. They emphasise the importance of belonging, in line with the school's aims.
12. Leaders have established a school culture where pupils are known as individuals and supported in working towards their goals by knowledgeable staff. Pupils readily contribute their ideas about the workings of the school, such as by initiating new extra-curricular activities or proposing topics for the 'THRIVE' programme. Leaders engage positively with these ideas and pupils know that they will be listened to.
13. Leaders in the junior school have established an aspirational environment where creativity and personal development are valued, leading to high levels of motivation and pupils showing pride in their work.
14. Governors exercise effective oversight of the school's leaders. They visit the school to talk to staff and pupils. Leaders keep them suitably informed about academic outcomes and they engage in the analysis of external examination results. Governors challenge and scrutinise leaders' decisions as appropriate.
15. Governors and leaders ensure that the core values and key aims of the school and its foundation are fully embedded and well known to pupils, staff and parents. 'Hesketh habits' are included in all junior school activities and referred to naturally in lessons and throughout the school day.
16. A detailed accessibility plan is reviewed annually and republished on a three-yearly cycle. There is a thorough approach to curriculum and site accessibility. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of the strategies implemented to support access to learning. In this way, the school fulfils its duty under the Equality Act 2010.
17. Leaders inform local authorities appropriately about pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). They are rigorous in sharing necessary information about any extended absences and pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
18. Leaders have the skills and knowledge to undertake effective self-evaluation. This forms a wide-ranging consultative process where leaders at all levels co-ordinate their development strategies to meet the foundation-wide objectives.
19. Leaders are consistent in managing risk across the school while allowing appropriate adaptation for age, context and activity, including trips and specialist teaching areas. They ensure that there are risk assessments in place for pupils who are particularly vulnerable. Dynamic risk management ensures that activities are reviewed and adjusted where necessary. Leaders promote a culture of shared responsibility and challenge, supported by regular reporting, external audits and proactive planning.
20. Policies for the Bolton School Foundation, and others that are specific to the Girls' Division and the Primary Division, are well maintained and updated as required. Governors and leaders oversee their implementation effectively.

21. The school provides all required information to pupils and parents in sufficient detail and in a transparent manner, mostly by way of its website. Suitably detailed reports inform parents about their child's work, with targets and guidance to foster further progress.
22. Leaders work appropriately with external agencies, including the local authority children's services and the police, to support the pupils, taking advice, as necessary.
23. Leaders ensure that all complaints, including those settled informally, are recorded appropriately. The complaints policy is implemented effectively following published timescales. Leaders monitor complaints for any trends. Governors audit complaints, signing off the register annually.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

25. Leaders have established a broad curriculum with subjects ranging from Greek to textiles. Leaders ensure that the curriculum provides suitable challenge for pupils with higher prior attainment. Suitable adaptations are made across the curriculum to embed support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in line with their pupil support plans. The curriculum, in subjects such as English, history and drama, uses a range of content to widen pupils' understanding of the whole world and different cultural contexts.
26. In the junior school, leaders demonstrate a clear and strategic approach to curriculum design, centred on developing pupils' oracy, creativity and real-life application of knowledge. The creative thinking projects and digital portfolios reflect that pupils are given opportunities to think and learn for themselves while maintaining academic rigour through careful planning and suitable assessment frameworks. In the creative thinking curriculum, pupils develop deeper understanding, adaptability and the ability to apply knowledge creatively, leading to high levels of engagement and effective outcomes for a wide range of pupils.
27. Pupils make good progress in English and the humanities, where their opinions are valued and well-planned activities allow a range of responses to be considered. Modelling from teachers allows pupils to be comfortable with formal discourse and an appropriate specialist vocabulary for linguistic and literary study. They make good progress in modern languages, where lessons provide engaging opportunities for interaction.
28. Mathematical skills are well supported and teachers foster good progress through adapting teaching to respond to pupil needs. Pupils make good progress in science, understanding specialist terminology. In these lessons, target setting by teachers and pupils promotes pupils' learning. Pupils work well in practical tasks such as in vinyl cutting for textiles. Their skills are developed over sustained projects in work for design technology.
29. Teachers have planned effective schemes of work and sequences of lessons. They also place useful emphasis on retrieving previously learned information. In the junior school, subject leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of curriculum intent and ensure that provision is coherently planned and consistently delivered.
30. Across the school, pupils who have SEND have their needs identified early. Key information for success is shared effectively with a pupil's teachers and support for pupils' needs is embedded in all lessons. Teachers analyse data effectively to consider the performance of pupils who have SEND alongside the rest of the cohort in terms of assessments, extra-curricular involvement and behavioural misconduct marks. Teachers in the junior school deliver appropriate programmes to support pupils who have SEND.
31. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are supported through teaching that is adapted effectively to meet their needs, targeted support and effective use of resources, enabling them to access the curriculum appropriately and make progress in line with their levels of prior attainment.
32. Pupils show suitable attitudes for learning. Supportive relationships between pupils and teachers facilitate purposeful working environments in which good progress can be made. Pupils work well with each other and show respect and consideration in their collaborative learning.

33. Teachers have suitable subject knowledge. In many lessons, they provide high-quality learning opportunities. However, some lessons do not challenge pupils sufficiently, such as when teachers ask questions that are restricted in scope. At these times, teaching is less well matched to pupils' needs and prior attainment.
34. Teachers offer effective feedback on pupils' written work and adapt their guidance in response to pupils' particular needs. Pupils respond positively to this guidance, developing their skills.
35. Leaders track pupils' work effectively at subject- and whole-school level. This whole-school academic data is shared with department leaders, complementing internal department sources of data to generate an accurate picture of pupils' progress. Teachers routinely share data with pupils and parents to keep all informed.
36. The programme for activities is extensive and inclusive, with high participation rates for music, drama, sports and residential experiences. The curriculum includes a residential visit to the school's outdoor learning centre in Patterdale. Pupils develop a range of skills, including teamwork, resilience and creativity, through their participation in the programme.

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

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

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

38. Leaders have established a range of strategies to promote pupils' emotional wellbeing and mental health. Staff in the wellbeing hub provide structured support for pupils who need additional help, including creative therapies and quiet spaces. Pupils have access to counselling and guidance from sixth-form mentors. Leaders support pupils suffering bereavement. They provide a weekly safe space for a small number of pupils to find solace in the company of others who have had similar experiences.
39. Through presentations in assembly, including from visiting speakers, leaders help pupils to understand different facets of an individual's identity and guide them in shaping appropriate responses. Leaders in the junior school have established a place where difference is celebrated. Pupils are helped to understand disabilities and different dietary needs.
40. The school supports its pupils' spiritual development through lessons on the world's major religions and engagement with a range of religious and cultural traditions, such as Holi and Iftar. Leaders facilitate visits to places of worship. Leaders provide opportunities for reflection through the arts and in response to the natural environment.
41. Leaders promote pupils' developing self-esteem. Pupils articulate their ideas fluently and discuss these with confidence, showing respect for each other's opinions. Teachers use the creative thinking curriculum in the junior school as a vehicle to promote pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem effectively through encouraging ownership of their learning and how it showcases their achievements. Most pupils perform in whole-school assemblies each year.
42. Pupils engage actively in lessons in the effective personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme. Leaders ensure that the curriculum follows PSHE professional recommendations, drawing on resources available to provide high-quality advice. Teachers ensure that the programme reflects the ethos of the school. It is also flexible and new lessons are introduced that respond to both topical issues for the school and national events. Pupils who perform the role of PSHE ambassador contribute effectively to planning, such as when they contribute questions to teaching resources.
43. The wide range of inclusive sports and clubs engages a great number of the pupils. They understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and make good choices in balancing their week. There are opportunities for elite performers and beginners in the lunchtime activities sessions.
44. In the relationships and sex education (RSE) programme, leaders communicate clearly with parents about the content covered and are open in discussions about adaptations to meet parent and pupil needs. Parents are made aware of their right to withdraw their child. A spiral curriculum sees a topic such as consent discussed with care in age-appropriate ways. Leaders ensure teachers monitor and support pupils appropriately through these learning experiences, with safeguarding teams aware of when issues may arise.
45. Behaviour is good within and outside taught classes. Suitable behaviour in lessons allows pupils to discuss sensitive ideas openly and sensibly. This is supported by a clear structure of rewards and sanctions. Bullying is rare. Teachers handle any incidents appropriately should they occur.

46. Health and safety protocols are detailed and proactive, with effective systems in place for preventative maintenance. Staff ensure that buildings and equipment are always well maintained. Facilities are clean and tidy. Staff keep thorough maintenance records. In-house expertise is supplemented by external contractors providing regular additional checks. There is suitable accommodation for all activities. Leaders ensure that suitable procedures are in place and understood by pupils and staff to promote fire prevention, including rigorous and frequent checking of equipment.
47. Leaders ensure that the supervision of pupils is carefully considered. Staff supervise pupils' behaviour appropriately in a warm and age-appropriate manner.
48. Leaders' management of attendance is suitable and reflects current guidance. Staff monitor attendance levels rigorously. They support pupils with individualised strategies to address any barriers to attendance, working closely with parents and carers.
49. Health provision is suitable, with well-equipped medical facilities and responsive communication systems in place, ensuring pupils' physical needs are met. First aid procedures are robust. A high number of staff have appropriate qualifications, including paediatric first aid and first responder training. Governors oversee the provision of medical support effectively.

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

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

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

51. Leaders are successful in embedding the school's values of kindness, equality, empathy, inclusivity and community into the daily life of the school. This is done through assemblies, tutor discussions, the PSHE programme and positive modelling by staff.
52. Leaders ensure that pupils understand fundamental British values. They visit Parliament and explore the rule of law through examining issues such as piracy. The school council allows pupils to experience an example of democracy in action. Pupils debate realistic proposed changes to the school's provision respectfully. British values are further promoted through the sciences and mathematics, with a particular focus on mutual respect. The challenge of artificial intelligence in promoting misinformation is addressed in computing. In the sciences, leaders ensure discussion of good role models and the promotion of careers for women in science.
53. Staff guide practical preparation for adulthood through lessons within PSHE such as finance education, alongside work on relationships and wider social themes. The extra-curricular programme further supports social development through broad participation and shared experiences.
54. Leaders develop pupils' understanding of charitable contribution. Pupils in the junior school vote for house charities and undertake activities such as crocheting scrunchies to raise funds. In keeping with the junior school's motto 'compassion is action', leaders ensure that pupils gain an understanding of where funds raised are used and the effects this can have. As part of a sustained initiative, pupils raise funds for building a school in Malawi, which enhances their understanding of global issues.
55. Pupils are respectful of other cultures within their diverse school and local community and accepting of those who may be different to themselves. Events such as a cultural day provide pupils with an opportunity to explore and celebrate cultural and spiritual identity with their peers through food, dress, traditions and shared information. Pupils make short films to present their ideas and experiences with the wider school community.
56. Pupils are enthusiastic in taking on roles within the school. These include subject ambassadors who work with younger pupils, as well as there being school prefects. Pupils in Year 8 support younger ones within the transition programme. Leaders respond to pupils sharing their views and adapt provision if appropriate, with pupils reporting discernible changes such as improvements to catering and uniform, as well as an expanded careers provision.
57. Leaders have ensured that there is a well-planned and age-appropriate scheme for careers education. This is aligned to national guidelines for careers education, with impartial up-to-date advice being given. Leaders are rigorous in checking that pupils will not be exposed to bias from outside speakers. In the sixth form, this is further enhanced by the WoW (Women of Work) alumnae mentorship programme.
58. Leaders have designed a curriculum to develop pupils' economic understanding. Pupils learn about banking and the management of a budget when planning a party. In the junior school, a theme day on 'my financial future' draws on aspects of learning for a range of subjects. Extra-curricular evenings such as a 'Dragons' Den' event help pupils to explore entrepreneurship.

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

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

60. Leaders ensure that safeguarding training for staff is appropriate, including at induction, and is updated to respond to changes in external guidance. A clear and appropriate safeguarding policy is implemented effectively and revised in response to statutory requirements. Staff know how to recognise signs of harm and how to respond to a concern. They understand their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty. Should there be a concern, action is taken quickly. Higher-level training is in place for the leaders with responsibility for safeguarding. They recognise the role of contextual factors for safeguarding, including family circumstances and financial pressures.
61. The school's management of low-level concerns is effective. Leaders keep suitable records, look for patterns and follow up concerns as appropriate, for example by arranging further training. Staff understand that sharing a concern is part of keeping everyone safe.
62. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding work effectively with external agencies, with an appropriate understanding of thresholds. They work constructively with the police and the designated officers for seven local authorities, taking advice as needed.
63. Pupils in the junior and senior schools understand there is a range of adults to support them, as needed, and know who to contact if they have a concern. They also understand how to raise concerns anonymously using an online system.
64. The school's arrangements for the internet filtering and monitoring system are rigorous. Specialist staff test the system on a weekly basis. Leaders receive alerts should anyone attempt to access inappropriate material. Staff assess any concerns promptly, responding on an individual basis, with leaders noticing and acting upon any trends that emerge.
65. A single central record of recruitment checks is efficiently kept. Leaders ensure that all necessary checks are completed before a member of staff begins work or volunteers at the school, with references verified. Recruitment files are well maintained.
66. Record-keeping for safeguarding is effective. The records show detailed timelines and indicate prompt responses to any concerns raised. The safeguarding team tracks developing cases effectively through an online system.
67. Governors exercise robust oversight of safeguarding by auditing policies and procedures. They are well informed about the school's work for safeguarding, as is illustrated when they conduct an effective and detailed annual review.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Bolton School Girls' Division
Department for Education number	350/6015
Registered charity number	1110703
Address	Bolton School Girls' Division Chorley New Road Bolton Lancashire BL1 4PB
Phone number	01204 840201
Email address	info@boltonschool.org
Website	www.boltonschool.org
Proprietor	Governors of the Bolton School Foundation
Chair	Mr Ian Riley
Headteacher	Mrs Lynne Kyle
Age range	7 to 18
Number of pupils	1,056
Date of previous inspection	18 to 20 April 2023

Information about the school

69. Bolton School Girls' Division is an independent day school for female pupils aged 7 to 18, located in central Bolton. The school is part of the Bolton School Foundation along with the Boys' Division and the infant and nursery schools, with which it shares a site. The school comprises a junior school and a senior school. In the sixth form, the teaching for a small number of subjects is shared with the Boys' Division. There is a 'Head of Foundation', overseeing the different divisions of Bolton School Foundation, as well as the headteacher of the Girls' Division, a headteacher of the Boys' Division and the headteacher of the Primary Division.
70. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors.
71. The school has identified 135 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
72. The school has identified English as an additional language for seven pupils.
73. The school states its aims are to realise the potential of each pupil: to challenge, encourage initiative, promote teamwork and develop leadership capabilities. The school aims for pupils to leave the school as self-confident young people equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes that will allow them to lead a happy and fulfilled life and to make a difference for good in the wider community.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

21 to 23 April 2026

74. A team of eight inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

75. 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.

76. 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.
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