

# School inspection report

3 to 5 March 2026

## **The Pilgrims' School**

The Close  
Winchester  
SO23 9LT

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 have an informed oversight of leaders' actions in all areas of school life. They ensure that leaders have the appropriate skills and knowledge and that they fulfil their responsibilities effectively, including for boarders and the children in early years. Leaders have a clear vision for the school's development, based on close monitoring and thorough self-evaluation. This ensures that the wellbeing of pupils is actively promoted and there is an inclusive learning environment that enables pupils to learn effectively.
2. Leaders and staff promote and support a culture of mutual respect. Pupils are articulate, kind and respectful of others. They demonstrate responsible and diligent attitudes towards their learning.
3. The curriculum is well structured, with continuity and progression to meet pupils' needs as they move through the school. Teachers know their pupils well and have an up-to-date awareness of pupils' achievements. They use assessment effectively to evaluate individual pupils' progress relative to their starting points and adjust their teaching to further pupils' development. Leaders' provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is effective. As a result, pupils throughout the school make good progress.
4. Leaders have a thorough understanding of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) and ensure that children in the early years are supported to meet age-related expectations.
5. Leaders implement an extensive and stimulating music curriculum that has a highly positive impact on pupils' musical achievements and the development of pupils' self-expression throughout the school. It is wide ranging and well designed to support pupils' different skills and interests. High-quality specialist teaching across the school supports pupils' high attainment in music. The co-curricular music programme is inclusive, with regular opportunities for collaboration, teamwork and community performances. As a result, pupils have a clear sense of belonging within the school and self-confidence through their engagement in the music. Music is a significant strength of the school.
6. Leaders implement a suitable curriculum for pupils' personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), which incorporates relationships and sex education (RSE) and takes into account the age and needs of pupils.
7. The school's premises and boarding houses are well maintained, with effective systems in place to ensure the safety of all pupils.
8. Careers talks extend pupils' understanding of opportunities in the workplace. However, pupils in Years 7 and 8 do not receive a sufficiently broad careers education to make well-informed choices for future career pathways.

## The extent to which the school meets the Standards

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

### Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that the careers education programme enables pupils in Years 7 and 8 to improve their knowledge and understanding of work-related opportunities and career pathways.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Governors make considered decisions about the strategic direction of the school, as demonstrated by the recent merger with Winchester College. A new committee structure supports governors' oversight of the implementation of policies and their evaluation of the information that leaders provide. Governors spend time in boarding houses, observe lessons and hold meetings with staff, boarders and day pupils to ensure that leaders systematically promote pupils' wellbeing and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. As a result, all Standards are met.
10. The school's focus on the wellbeing of pupils firmly underpins the school's development plan. Leaders have identified the careers education programme as an area to be strengthened. Although steps have been taken to improve it by using visiting speakers, as yet, the programme does not enable all pupils to have a full awareness of the range of work-related pathways they could follow.
11. All the required information is shared on the school's website or made available to parents. An accessibility plan is in place and is designed appropriately to increase access to learning and facilities for pupils who have SEND, as specified by the Equality Act 2010. Adjustments to teaching and learning approaches are embedded into ongoing review processes to support pupils to access the curriculum.
12. Teachers provide parents with regular information about the progress their child is making through a comprehensive schedule of written reports and parents' meetings.
13. Leaders are knowledgeable about the contextual risks to pupils' safety and take effective action in response. For instance, the supervision arrangement for the movement of pupils from the school to the cathedral for services is constantly reviewed to mitigate risks to pupils. There is a systematic approach to risk assessment and management throughout the school and in boarding.
14. The leadership of boarding is effective. There are established procedures in place that ensure that boarding policies, documentation and records are maintained, and appropriate action is taken.
15. Leaders implement a suitable written complaints policy and keep an appropriate log of any complaints received. Boarders know how to raise concerns. Complaints specific to boarding are clearly identified and responded to in line with their policy.
16. Leaders maintain effective relationships with external agencies to promote pupils' wellbeing, including with local safeguarding partners. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and reflect current statutory guidance. The school reports, to the appropriate local authority, any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times in the school year.

### 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. The school offers a structured curriculum that is appropriate for the needs and abilities of all pupils. It covers an appropriate range of academic and creative subjects, including French from the early years. From Year 6, pupils build their wider understanding of language construction through lessons in Latin. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning across the sections of the school, so that they make consistently good progress. Pupils in Year 8 gain places at the senior schools of their choice, many winning academic, music and sport scholarships.
19. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and deliver well-planned lessons that consider the individual needs and aptitudes of all pupils. The school has an effective framework for systematically assessing and reviewing pupils' progress from their individual starting points, arranging tailored support for pupils. Teachers actively integrate British values into lessons to ensure that the curriculum promotes mutual respect and meets the aptitudes and needs of all pupils.
20. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning and are motivated to extend their knowledge and their understanding. Teachers provide written and oral feedback to pupils about their work, which explains how they can improve and develop their thinking further. Pupils' responses show development; they check, evaluate and correct their work before moving on to their next step challenge. Teachers use dialogue and questioning effectively to deepen pupils' thinking and for them to correct any misconceptions. As a result, pupils develop appropriate skills and knowledge. In debates and in their writing, pupils use their imagination and progressively complex vocabulary to extend their writing and link subject knowledge effectively. For example, they use numerical skills well when analysing experimental data in science lessons, discuss historical facts in French and link the philosophies of Thomas Aquinas and Stoicism to current leaders and threats to global world order in their work.
21. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive tailored support in class. Staff ensure that instructions are understood and provide appropriate repetition, modelling and practical resources, including word banks, to ensure that pupils who speak EAL can access the curriculum.
22. Leaders ensure that staff have detailed and precise guidance through summary and individual support plans to enable adaptation of teaching in lessons for pupils who have SEND. Consequently, pupils who have SEND access the curriculum and make good progress from their individual starting points.
23. The children in the early years make good progress. They build their language skills systematically through effective interactions with adults and their peers in activities that support the children's development of reading, writing and speaking. The children apply their understanding of numeracy in increasingly complex tasks from, for example, doubling numbers to dividing fractions using butterfly wings, to explaining their methods using a number line to solve word problems.
24. The music curriculum enables all pupils to explore and develop their musical interests in substantial breadth and depth, with most pupils playing at least one musical instrument. Across the school, pupils have a mature understanding of music genres. Pupils confidently link art history and architecture to the music of the time. For example, in Year 6, they decide whether a piece of music is classical or baroque and discuss their reasoning referring to the balance, symmetry and form of each piece using technical vocabulary. Many pupils participate in the ensembles, open and auditioned

choirs, orchestras and bands. Most pupils achieve music examinations with the highest grade, with some reaching diploma level and a few to repertoire. Teachers' expertise and pupils' regular participation in a breadth of inclusive music lessons, clubs, activities and events has a positive impact on their enjoyment of music and their musical achievements. The level of choral performance of pupils who are cathedral choristers or Winchester College quiristers is also very high.

25. There is effective communication between teaching and boarding. Boarders can access supervised additional support with their work where needed. Staff ensure that the academic profile and performance of each boarder is tracked to enable support to assure their good progress.
26. The school's varied and extensive co-curricular programme including, for example, computing, art, animation, chess, Judo, yoga, debating, woodland activities and a range of sports, is planned so that it encourages all pupils of all abilities to broaden their interests, skills and self-confidence.

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

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

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

28. Leaders implement a well-planned PSHE curriculum effectively. It teaches pupils how to maintain mutually respectful friendships. Older pupils learn about the importance of a balanced diet and the dangers to health of, for example, smoking, vaping and using illegal drugs. Consequently, pupils know how to keep themselves safe and how to seek help if required. In the early years, staff supervise the children when they eat, ensuring that they learn about, and try, healthy foods.
29. Leaders promote pupils' social development effectively through an emphasis on respect for one another. The children in the early years take turns, share resources, play co-operatively and develop an understanding of how to interact with each other kindly. The vertical tutor group system enables older pupils to support the younger children with their meals at lunchtimes and engage in shared sports events. Through this experience, pupils develop a sense of social responsibility and build positive relationships.
30. The PSHE curriculum includes a suitable RSE programme that is age-appropriate and incorporates pupil input, thereby enhancing its relevance and impact. Pupils evaluate their own understanding of the curriculum topics and their progress. Parents are informed about the content of the lessons and of their child's progress in RSE. In the early years, staff model and teach respectful interactions and age-appropriate understanding of consent, helping children to form positive relationships with adults and their peers.
31. The physical education (PE) and games curriculum is well resourced and taught by specialist staff in ways that contribute positively to pupils' wellbeing. It has an emphasis on skill development including, for example, in the team sports of cricket, rugby and football, as well as swimming and athletics. Children in the early years develop fine and gross motor skills in PE, for example when they learn how to throw and kick a ball.
32. Pupils have a well-developed spiritual and moral understanding aligned with the school's Christian ethos. They learn about the world's major religions and different faiths in their theology, philosophy and religion (TPR) lessons and in history, where they discuss ethical questions, such as those related to conflict, migration and the concept of respect. Teachers provide frequent opportunities for pupils to reflect on their thoughts and beliefs, for example during assemblies, dedicated weekly reflection times, services in the cathedral and through the creative curriculum.
33. Pupils speak with confidence and express their views and feelings clearly and openly. In the early years, self-understanding is promoted at the start of each day, when the children share if that they feel 'fuzzy or fabulous' as an emotional regulation gauge. The children in pre-prep speak confidently about their learning.
34. Wellbeing and positive mental health are promoted. The wellbeing of all pupils, including those with additional roles such as the prefects, those taking advanced music examinations, the choristers and the quiristers, is carefully considered and monitored by leaders, so that pupils do not become overburdened.
35. Staff implement an effective behaviour policy. It emphasises respectful interactions and provides an age-appropriate scale of consequences, which considers the needs of all pupils. Pupils know how

positive behaviour is rewarded and how sanctions enable them to learn from errors. Staff act promptly when any unkind behaviour occurs. Bullying is rare and pupils know what to do and who to talk to if it occurs. Staff respond to instances of bullying appropriately and maintain comprehensive records.

36. Leaders maintain a thorough and systematic approach to health and safety. The school's approach to mitigating risk is appropriate, with suitable risk assessments in place. The school nurses ensure that the medical needs of pupils are met through robust first aid systems and a culture of care. The nurses and early years staff are all paediatric first aid trained. Facilities for the care of pupils or boarders who are ill or injured are appropriate.
37. Leaders ensure that all pupils of all ages are supervised effectively throughout the school day, including outside lesson times. The required ratios of adults to children are maintained in the early years, ensuring that children are always within sight and hearing of adults. Boarders are well supervised, including during recreational activities in the evenings and at weekends. Leaders monitor boarders' free time to ensure their wellbeing. There is always an adult resident in the boarding house overnight so that boarders can seek help if necessary.
38. The school's admission and attendance policies are implemented effectively. The school maintains an accurate admission register. The school's attendance champion liaises with the relevant authorities, as necessary. The local authority is informed about any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition points.
39. Boarding accommodation is comfortable and well maintained. Meals are suitable and include appropriate provision for pupils who have specific dietary needs. Guardianship arrangements are monitored closely to ensure boarders are safeguarded.
40. Prefects meet regularly with the leadership to hear pupils' opinions on the wellbeing of the school and advise them on matters that may influence the strategic direction of the school. Pupils from all year groups, including boarders, serve on the school council to represent the views of the school community. Pupils demonstrate leadership and are role models in roles such as house captains and in the wide range of responsibilities they hold supporting younger peers, as illustrated by pupils' care of new pupils to help them settle into the daily routine of the school.

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

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

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

42. The house system creates opportunities for pupils of different age groups to learn from each other. Pupils understand the importance of mutual respect and of treating others equally in the school community and wider world. In lessons and house activities, they listen to their peers and to different views that challenge their thinking. The school's approach to diversity and inclusion is woven into the curriculum in subject areas, such as when they gain an understanding of race discrimination from their study of texts in English, history and the structured programme of assemblies.
43. Fundamental British values are well promoted and embedded through themes covered in the PSHE curriculum, chapel services, assemblies and visiting speaker talks. The themes are mapped to promote and discuss democracy, why rules matter, individual liberty and the concept of mutual respect. As a result, across the school, pupils have a sense of what is right and wrong. Pupils learn how national government functions from the curriculum and visiting speakers such as a local MP. Staff provide guidance when pupils encounter political topics to ensure that discussion remains unbiased.
44. Leaders in the early years arrange a thorough transition programme that prepares children in Reception so that they confidently move into Year 1 and between the sections of the school. Leaders have developed the careers programme for pupils in Years 7 and 8, with regular careers talks by guest speakers to broaden pupils' professional awareness. The choristers and quiristers experience choral training, which prepares them for choral work. The guidance on how knowledge and skills gained in the classroom can be used in the workplace is more limited. This restricts the pupils' capacity to make informed choices about broader work-related opportunities.
45. Pupils collaborate and debate with leaders on strategic decision-making in the school and can influence decisions. This is achieved through pupils' participation in the school council, eco-committee, prefects' engagement with leaders and the use of suggestion boxes in classrooms. The impact is seen around the school, for instance in new play equipment, footballs and a tennis net for playtime.
46. Pupils gain an understanding of different cultural and social perspectives of the world from assemblies, specific culture days and lessons such as PSHE and geography. Boarders are encouraged to share their own cultural traditions with day pupils by demonstrating their different feelings towards the same context and in their daily interactions that reflect their own cultural heritage. Teachers use stories, festivals and peer conversations in lessons to develop pupils' awareness of individuals' similarities and differences.
47. Charitable endeavour is embedded into school life. Leaders encourage pupils to contribute positively to the local and wider communities. Pupils organise and participate in fundraising activities, such as music and sports marathons. The choirs are involved in partnerships with local charities and local schools. Pupils make donations to the local community, including the foodbank.
48. The curriculum enables pupils to develop their economic understanding. Children in the early years are supported to understand the role of money through their play-based learning. Over time, they progress to tasks involving counting and splitting change. Older pupils learn about the value of

money, debt and financial decision-making in mathematics, PSHE and cross-curricular opportunities, for instance, debating the cost of items in French in their French lesson.

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

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

## Safeguarding

50. Safeguarding procedures are implemented effectively so that the wellbeing of boarders and day pupils, including children in the early years, is promoted. Safeguarding induction and training for staff, including for the safeguarding team and governors, are regular and in line with local authority requirements. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and know how to escalate concerns when required.
51. Governors review safeguarding policies and procedures effectively. They hold discussions with staff and pupils across the school, including in the boarding houses and early years. This ensures that their oversight of the implementation of safeguarding arrangements is effective and that safeguarding leaders receive appropriate challenge and support.
52. 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.
53. Leaders recognise the school's contextual safeguarding risks geographically, as a boarding school with choristers, quiristers and overseas boarders, and the requirements that relate to working with children in the early years. As a result, suitable safeguarding arrangements are in place to ensure all pupils are safeguarded.
54. Pupils know who the members of the safeguarding team are and are confident that they can talk to any trusted adult. Pupils are provided with a 'worry box' and an online platform to raise concerns.
55. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including when using social media platforms online. Internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place to alert the safeguarding team of concerns. Any alerts that are registered are quickly investigated and recorded, as are any subsequent actions that are taken. Leaders check the systems regularly and report on their effectiveness to the governing body. Close restrictions and supervision of boarders' mobile phone use ensures that boarders are protected from encountering inappropriate online material during their free time.
56. There is suitable liaison with parents on arrangements for the guardianship of boarders to ensure continuity of boarders' safeguarding.
57. Safer recruitment processes are followed rigorously. Staff files include appropriate evidence to confirm that the required pre-employment checks are completed for all staff and for non-employee adults living in boarding accommodation. A suitable single central record of appointments (SCR) is in place that accurately records the checks that have been undertaken.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	The Pilgrims' School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	850/6013
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1139000
<b>Address</b>	The Pilgrims' School The Close Winchester Hampshire SO23 9LT
<b>Phone number</b>	01962 854189
<b>Email address</b>	office@pilgrims-school.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.thepilgrims-school.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Warden and Scholars of St Mary College of Winchester
<b>Chair</b>	Sir Richard Stagg
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Tim Butcher
<b>Age range</b>	4 to 13
<b>Number of pupils</b>	213
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	76
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	21 to 23 February 2023

## Information about the school

59. The Pilgrims' School is an independent day and boarding school for male pupils in Winchester, Hampshire. The school was founded in 1931 on its current site in the Close of Winchester Cathedral. The school is divided into four sections: the pre-prep, for children in Reception to Year 2; the lower section, for pupils in Years 3 and 4; the middle section, for pupils in Years 5 and 6; and the upper section, for pupils in Years 7 and 8. Training for Winchester Cathedral choristers and Winchester College quiristers is provided at the school.
60. In September 2025, the school merged with Winchester College, which is a registered charity. The Pilgrims' Committee is an advisory body chaired by a governor of Winchester College. The governing body of Winchester College is responsible for the governance of The Pilgrims' School.
61. There are two boarding houses offering full-time boarding. The boarding house for pupils in Years 4 to 8, including those who are choristers and quiristers in Year 5, is in the main school building. The boarding house for pupils in Years 6 to 8 only, including quiristers in Years 6 to 8, is located a few minutes' walk from the main school building.
62. There are 10 children in the early years in one Reception class.
63. The school has identified 62 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
64. The school has identified English as an additional language for 32 pupils.
65. The school states its aims are to develop the special character and interests of each boy, seeking the fullest achievement of his potential through wide and varied opportunities within a caring community. The school sees the nurturing of good character, wise judgement, excellence and enthusiasm as central.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

3 to 5 March 2026

66. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

67. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

68. 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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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)