

# School inspection report

29 April to 1 May 2025

## **Aldenham School**

Elstree

Borehamwood

Hertfordshire

WD6 3AJ

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 ensure that all staff have the appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively in order to promote pupils' wellbeing and academic development, including for boarders and children in the early years, and meet the Standards.
2. The governing body evaluates the impact of decisions relating to pupils' wellbeing through reports and action plans informed by well-considered self-evaluation.
3. Whilst leaders have recently made adjustments to the awarding of sanctions for poor behaviour, not all initiatives are fully embedded. There is some low-level disruptive behaviour in the lower years of the senior school.
4. Attendance and absence are monitored closely. The attendance policies for the preparatory school and the senior school are implemented effectively. However, the senior school's attendance policy was not made available on the senior school's website for pupils, parents and staff. This was rectified during the inspection.
5. Leaders promote equality, inclusion and diversity, with pupils showing respect for each other through their actions and words. The Christian ethos of the school and chaplaincy contribute to pupils' moral and spiritual development. Pupils show tolerance and respect for different beliefs and faiths. Cultural awareness and social responsibility are promoted through community service.
6. The well-planned and structured curriculum across all phases of the school provides pupils with appropriate learning opportunities matched to their ages and prior attainment. This allows pupils to make good progress.
7. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress due to the tailored support they receive. Leaders provide external agencies with all required information for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans.
8. Leaders meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and effectively implement a suitable accessibility plan.
9. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) have resources adjusted to meet their individual English language requirements in order to ensure their ability to access the curriculum.
10. Leaders implement a suitable relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum for older pupils. Pupils develop the knowledge and skills that will help them to make informed decisions in life.
11. Leaders prepare pupils well for the next stage in their education, supporting smooth transitions and providing careers guidance aligned with national benchmarks. The economic education programme runs throughout the school, from an understanding of money in the early years through to financial planning, budgeting and taxation in the sixth form.
12. Leaders maintain appropriate levels of staff supervision throughout the day and in boarding. Health and safety procedures and related policies are implemented effectively. Suitable risk assessments are reviewed regularly. The premises and boarding houses are well maintained and secure.

13. Governors maintain effective oversight of safeguarding. Appropriate action is taken when pupils are thought to be at risk, including referrals to external agencies. Leaders carry out the required pre-employment checks to ensure staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children. Pupils learn how to stay safe online, with secure and tested filtering and monitoring systems in place.
14. When pupils transfer to or join from another school, appropriate information is shared. Guardianship arrangements for boarders are monitored by leaders.

## 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 teachers in the lower years of the senior school address low-level disruptive behaviour more effectively
- ensure that the school's attendance policy is published on the senior school's website.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

15. Governors evaluate the impact of decisions made by leaders on pupils' wellbeing through development plans and reports for all phases of the school. Governors challenge and provide support to senior leaders to ensure that leaders have the skills and knowledge to meet their responsibilities effectively and ensure that Standards are met.
16. Leaders at all levels demonstrate a commitment to improvement. Their actions are informed by regular self-evaluation. This has led to a range of initiatives in recent years, including changes to the management of pastoral care and safeguarding to ensure effective and prompt sharing of information so that swift action is taken to keep children safe.
17. In the early years and prep school, pupils demonstrate respect towards each other, reflecting school-wide expectations and pupils' understanding of the hierarchy of rewards and sanctions. Leaders' expectations of positive behaviour in the senior school are promoted through their role-modelling and implementation of the school's behaviour policy, but there is inconsistency in how the policy is applied at times. Low-level disruption in some lessons in the lower years of the senior school is not challenged effectively. As a result, learning is sometimes disrupted.
18. Parents are provided with up-to-date information on the school's website, which contains relevant policies and information. Governors maintain oversight of the school's policies and procedures to promote pupils' wellbeing and their academic and pastoral development. Governors monitor the implementation of the school's policies to ensure Standards are met through regular visits to the school.
19. Although the school's attendance policy incorporating the latest statutory guidance is effectively implemented in the preparatory and senior schools and is made available on the preparatory school website, it was not available to pupils, parents and staff on the senior school website at the beginning of the inspection. This was rectified during the inspection.
20. Leaders ensure appropriate oversight of risk management. They have an understanding of how to mitigate against any potential harm to pupils and are proactive in identifying risks to their safety, including those relating to educational trips, the school site, boarding houses, outdoor activities and their general wellbeing.
21. The leadership of boarding is effective. Boarders are well cared for. Effective communication between house and academic staff ensures that pupils' wellbeing is monitored and supported and that boarders' academic needs are met. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities for the arrangements of boarders by implementing systems to monitor the suitability of educational guardians.
22. The school publishes a suitable accessibility plan outlining reasonable adjustments for pupils who have specific needs. Leaders make improvements to enable better access to both premises and the curriculum, though timescales are not always clearly recorded.
23. Leaders have established effective links with external agencies, for instance with the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and the local authority, with whom they share relevant information, including about their use of funds in relation to any pupils with an EHC plan.

24. Leaders have compiled a suitable complaints policy that is implemented effectively. Formal complaints are managed in a timely manner, with governor involvement if necessary.

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

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

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

26. There is a well-planned and structured curriculum throughout the school, which provides pupils with age-appropriate learning opportunities across the required areas. In the early years, children work towards the early learning goals (ELGs) and typically reach nationally expected levels of development by the end of the Reception year. Pupils in the preparatory and secondary school have access to an appropriate linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education. Pupils are taught at least one modern foreign language. Spanish and French are taught in the final years of the preparatory school.
27. National mathematics, technology, science and other subject challenges, including essay, poetry and creative writing competitions, create interest and extend pupils' knowledge. An 'aspire' programme of talks, designed to deepen thinking, provides opportunities for pupils in the senior school to extend their knowledge and skills. Leaders have created a wide range of extra-curricular enrichment opportunities to promote pupils' physical, personal and mental health. The programme allows pupils to explore their interests and develop new skills, for example in a range of sports, martial arts, creative and performance arts pursuits, and STEM and environmental activities. All pupils are required to participate in some way so that they learn to persevere with tasks, collaborate with each other, learn new physical and creative skills and develop an appreciation of the natural world.
28. The inclusion of the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) within the breadth of outdoor activities promotes the development of pupils' teamwork and leadership skills, and helps boarders develop these skills and create supportive relationships.
29. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. Through skilful questioning, teachers promote thoughtful discussion in lessons. Across the school, pupils have well-developed communication skills and express their ideas fluently. Effective adult interactions in the early years introduce new vocabulary and create a language-rich environment. The children are confident communicators. Pupils' numeracy skills progress well from the early years onwards through sequential application of their mathematical and arithmetic knowledge to increasingly complex abstract and real-world problems. Pupils reflect on their thinking in order to deepen their understanding.
30. There is a clear understanding and knowledge of what children in the early years and pupils in the preparatory school know and can do and what their next steps are. Staff are prompt in identifying required strategies and implementing support. Across all phases of the school, pupils receive helpful feedback from teachers on their progress in various formats, including digitally, orally and in writing, to clarify misconceptions in their understanding. Pupils respond with their own edits and learn from their mistakes, which supports their progress. Typically, these are revisited by teachers so that errors are addressed in subsequent work.
31. Across all age groups, the strategic use of assessment data informs adjustments to curriculum plans and enables leaders and teachers to tailor support effectively. The school's 'close the gap' programme targets pupils who are underperforming and ensures that all pupils make good progress.
32. Pupils who have SEND make good progress. This is as a result of specialist support and individualised provision informed by detailed lesson planning which reflects teachers' knowledge of pupils' needs. Greater consistency of information sharing with parents of pupils who have SEND is a recent development to support pupils' learning and wellbeing.



33. The needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are identified on entry to the school. Teachers adjust their teaching, taking account of pupils' level of need and the assistance they may require, for example with subject-specific vocabulary.

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

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

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

35. Leaders promote equality and inclusion. Throughout the school, pupils show respect for each other through their actions, words and understanding. They listen to each other and to instructions, take turns, share resources and are kind in their interactions. The youngest children are confident in recognising their emotions and explaining why they feel the way they do. In the preparatory and senior schools and in boarding houses, there is an awareness of the need for tolerance and respect for all, including respect for people's race, religion and sex.
36. Leaders have set out clear expectations for the behaviour of pupils in the school's behaviour policy and code of conduct. The school's approach to the giving of sanctions is known by pupils and staff across the school, and typically pupils behave well and demonstrate the school's core value of respect. In the lower years of the senior school, however, there is low-level disruptive behaviour in some lessons due to an inconsistency in the implementation of the behaviour policy and of the school's sanctions for poor behaviour.
37. Pupils recognise bullying and know how to report incidents. An anti-bullying committee with representatives from each year group promotes understanding of the school's anti-bullying strategy. When bullying occurs, leaders act promptly and effectively to support pupils and prevent recurrence.
38. The chaplaincy contributes to pupils' moral and spiritual development. From the early years onwards, the school creates opportunities for children to experience spirituality as they discuss different religions in religious studies (RS) lessons and attend services in the school chapel. Faith groups and a faith room enable pupils to pray and worship according to their beliefs. Through the teaching of philosophy, religion and ethics (PRE) and the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum, pupils discuss modern ethical dilemmas thoughtfully, offering different moral and spiritual perspectives. Pupils throughout the school show tolerance and respect for different beliefs, faiths and cultures.
39. In PSHE and physical education (PE), pupils learn that exercise and healthy eating contribute to a healthy and balanced lifestyle. As a result, pupils throughout the school are knowledgeable about how exercise relates to their physical and mental health and the importance of a balanced diet.
40. Children in the early years effectively develop gross and fine motor skills when playing outdoors, during woodland activities, while navigating obstacle courses and in PE lessons, where staff support the children to co-ordinate their movements and develop agility skills. Across the school, many pupils demonstrate a high level of skill in sport and play football and other team sports competitively.
41. Across the school, the relationships and RSE programmes are regularly reviewed and assessed to ensure they cover national guidance and equip pupils with essential life skills, for instance in relation to personal hygiene, consent, online safety and a healthy lifestyle. Parents are kept informed about the content of the curriculum and have the option to withdraw their child from certain topics within sex education. In the sixth form, the content is developed to meet pupils' evolving interests and needs. For example, pupils learn about female safety and the healthy functioning of a community.

The programme is planned carefully to enable pupils to make informed decisions and seek help when needed.

42. Appropriate supervision at breaktimes ensures that pupils are looked after, with suitable staff-to-child ratios in the early years. The supervision of boarders is equally robust.
43. Boarding staff are suitably trained and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Requirements are well managed and clearly set out in policies and documents. Boarding premises and accommodation provide a safe, secure and comfortable living environment. Boarders take on clearly defined and appropriate responsibilities, receive guidance on how to act as role models for younger pupils and are given an appropriate balance of free time.
44. Leaders take a robust approach to health and safety, including fire safety. The school ensures compliance with fire regulations through effective implementation of its fire risk assessments and mitigations such as regular fire evacuation drills, including those during boarding time, and checks on fire prevention and evacuation apparatus and equipment.
45. Staff in the school's health centre and medical room in the preparatory school provide appropriate first aid and suitable mental health and other care for pupils who are ill or injured, including for boarders. Robust processes for storing and administering medication are in place. Sufficient staff are trained in first aid, with staff in the early years undertaking paediatric first aid training. Trained staff in school and external professionals provide appropriate support for pupils suffering from mental health issues.
46. Leaders have implemented suitable arrangements in relation to the statutory requirements for admissions and attendance. Leaders inform the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times. They monitor pupils' attendance closely and absenteeism is followed up. Boarders have a clear process for signing in and out of houses, which ensures that leaders are always aware of their whereabouts.

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

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

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

48. Leaders actively promote British values. Democracy, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance and individual liberty are understood by pupils as a result of a well-planned series of topics taught in PSHE lessons, talks by visiting speakers and wider engagement in activities. Early years staff support the development of children's understanding of law enforcement and service through visits, for example, from a police officer and a member of the armed forces. Pupils across all phases of the school experience democracy through mock political elections, elections to committees such as the school council and through making choices, for example when voting for improvements such as school desserts for lunch or making recommendations for evening and weekend activities in the boarding houses.
49. Pupils' social responsibility across the preparatory and senior schools develops through community service and as they explore and debate moral and political issues in lessons, tutor time and assemblies, or when listening to talks from local political representatives. Discussions about current affairs and moral dilemmas in lessons help pupils across all phases develop a deeper awareness of ethical issues, such as those around free speech or the causes of war. Staff in the early years use a range of effective strategies to develop children's social interactions and skills to help them appreciate the views of others.
50. Pupils develop their knowledge of different cultures through the curriculum, overseas trips and from visiting speakers who promote cultural understanding, for example, when studying, visiting and raising funds to support education in Malawi.
51. Pupils across the school fundraise for local, national and international charities. Pupils visit care homes to give musical performances, share events with local schools such as book fairs and singing festivals, donate food to the local foodbank and volunteer in global contexts. These experiences enable inter-generational and civic engagement, thereby preparing pupils for life in British society.
52. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education through a careers programme that aligns with national benchmarks. Leaders ensure pupils' learning needs are met as they move up through the school. Across all phases, impartial guidance is provided about future careers from visiting speakers who talk about career pathways in a range of settings. Pupils in the sixth form attend careers fairs, undertake mock interviews and receive specialist support that suits their individual career aspirations and applications to vocational, further education and university courses in the UK and abroad.
53. A programme of economic education is threaded through the curriculum. Pupils in the preparatory and senior schools use their numeracy skills to calculate interest and profit and loss in mathematics lessons. They learn about debt and explore the concept of what money cannot buy in PSHE lessons. Children in the early years begin to understand financial management in their use of banknotes and coins, for example when conducting role plays involving paying for commodities and receiving tickets and change. Pupils in the senior school apply their numeracy skills to real-life economic problem-solving. For example, pupils understand the skills required to sell a product and the financial considerations required to develop a successful business proposal. Pupils in the sixth form learn about financial planning, student loans, budgeting for daily living and taxation in the UK.

54. There is a wide-ranging programme of activities for those below school age, including regular outdoor activities such as woodland learning sessions and participation in wider house activities and school productions, where children learn how to collaborate and develop their self-confidence.

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

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

## Safeguarding

56. Governors and leaders implement a comprehensive and robust safeguarding policy to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils, including children in the early years and boarders. The contextual risks to pupils, including the risks to boarders, are understood by staff and they take suitable steps to mitigate these. Staff at all levels, including in the early years, know the signs that a child may be at risk of harm and who to contact if they have concerns.
57. Training for leaders and governors is up to date and promotes an understanding that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements through visits and termly reports prepared by leaders with responsibility for safeguarding.
58. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities undertake appropriate training to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to fulfil their role and understand and adhere to local authority safeguarding protocols.
59. Staff are clear about their safeguarding responsibilities. Effective training ensures that they have an appropriate level of knowledge and are confident about how to handle disclosures and escalate concerns. New staff, including those in the early years and those with boarding responsibilities, receive appropriate safeguarding training as part of their induction when they start work at the school. All staff and governors receive regular safeguarding updates.
60. Pastoral and safeguarding records are carefully logged on the school's digital management system and monitored by the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and safeguarding team. Appropriate action is taken, including referrals to the relevant external agencies, such as the local authority designated officer (LADO), as required. Leaders and governors have put in place effective procedures to report and manage allegations and low-level concerns about the behaviour of adults in school.
61. Throughout the school, pupils are aware of trusted adults in whom they can confide if they have a concern. They are confident that they will be listened to. Pupils in the senior school can also use an electronic communication system to report a concern anonymously. In addition, boarders have access to an independent person to whom they can speak.
62. Leaders carry out all required pre-employment checks to ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children before they start at the school. A single central record (SCR) of appointments accurately records the checks. Governors regularly review the SCR and the school's recruitment procedures to ensure the Standards in relation to staff appointments are met.
63. Pupils learn how to stay safe online through discussions in PSHE and other lessons and in assemblies. A secure filtering and monitoring system is in place on all school devices. These systems are tested regularly to ensure their effectiveness and reliability in mitigating risks of access to inappropriate online content whilst ensuring that access to educational resources is not limited. The safeguarding team responds promptly to alerts they receive. Pupils' access to devices is limited to specific times of the day and locations, dependent on age, in order to support their wellbeing.
64. Guardianship arrangements for boarders are monitored by leaders.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Aldenham School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	919/6003
<b>Registered charity number</b>	298140
<b>Address</b>	Aldenham School Elstree Borehamwood Hertfordshire WD6 3AJ
<b>Phone number</b>	01923 858122
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@aldenham.com
<b>Website</b>	www.aldenham.com
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Aldenham Foundation
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Sarah Altman
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Alex Hems
<b>Age range</b>	3 to 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	853
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	128
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 to 11 February 2022



## Information about the school

1. Aldenham School is a co-educational day and boarding school. Since the last inspection the school has appointed a new head of the foundation.
2. The school is a registered charity administered by the governing body of the Aldenham Foundation, including representation from the Brewers' Company.
3. The school is divided into three sections on the same site: the pre-preparatory department for pupils aged 3 to 7, which includes the Nursery; the preparatory school for those aged 7 to 11 years; and the senior school for pupils aged 11 to 19 years. The age range of 3 to 11 years is collectively referred to as Aldenham Preparatory.
4. Flexi- and full boarding are offered from the age of 11 in one of five boarding houses situated on the school site, and from age 13 in four of the five boarding houses.
5. The school has identified 203 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
6. The school states its aims are to educate young people so that they may flourish personally in order to succeed academically and thereby contribute positively towards the world of their time.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

29 April to 1 May 2025

66. A team of eight 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 head of each school phase, 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)