

School inspection report

3 to 5 June 2025

Barrow Hills School

Roke Lane

Witley

Godalming

Surrey

GU8 5NY

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'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	4
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	5
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	6
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	7
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	8
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	9
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	10
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	11
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	12
SAFEGUARDING	13
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	13
SCHOOL DETAILS	14
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	15
INSPECTION DETAILS	16

Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors monitor the school thoroughly, visiting frequently to maintain close links with staff and pupils and ensure they are knowledgeable about the key features of school life and to assure themselves that Standards are met and the core values of the school are maintained.
2. Leaders ensure that parents are well informed about their children's academic and pastoral progress and about the school's policies and wider activities. Leaders take suitable actions to mitigate potential risks that have been identified.
3. The school provides pupils with a well-planned curriculum which leaders keep under review and adapt in order to support the pupils' acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. As a result, pupils typically make good progress and develop their understanding of key concepts. They are enthusiastic, diligent learners who speak confidently and take pleasure in their classwork and the wide range of extra-curricular activities available to them.
4. Well-informed teachers provide pupils with typically well-planned lessons which provide levels of challenge appropriately matched to the pupils' needs. The pupils enjoy the explanations and activities offered in such lessons and make good progress. However, these qualities are not evident in all lessons and, on these occasions, class time is not always used effectively. When this is the case, pupils do not make such good progress as is typically the case.
5. Leaders successfully promote the pupils' pastoral wellbeing in a warm, supportive environment which prioritises empathy, tolerance and mutual respect. Staff model thoughtful behaviour and apply behavioural management strategies consistently, with the result that pupils conduct themselves in a calm, considerate manner. Pupils receive effective support in learning how to manage relationships with others and, if they have concerns, there are adults they can turn to for support and guidance.
6. Pupils benefit from well-maintained premises in which they can learn and play. Leaders ensure effective health and safety management and appropriate supervision of the pupils as they engage in different activities. If pupils are injured or unwell, suitably qualified staff are available to support them.
7. Pupils learn about the key values upon which democratic society is based. Leaders listen to the pupils' opinions and provide opportunities for them to determine what will happen in school through voting and elections. Pupils also benefit from being given leadership positions which provide them with experience of taking responsibility for aspects of school life.
8. Leaders ensure that pupils are taught how to manage money and support them in learning skills of project management. Leaders also promote the importance of community involvement. Pupils raise money for charitable causes and act effectively to support the local community.
9. Leaders manage safeguarding effectively. They respond appropriately and in accordance with current statutory guidance should any safeguarding issues arise.

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 teaching challenges pupils of all abilities sufficiently to enable them to develop their knowledge and skills consistently effectively.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school. They conduct informal interviews with every Year 7 pupil and visit the school regularly to meet with pupils and staff. They listen carefully to the opinions of pupils and staff and analyse data on key aspects of school life. Governors use the information gained to inform their monitoring and to challenge and support school leaders to ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the school meets the Standards.
11. School leaders apply their skills and knowledge to promote the academic, pastoral and physical wellbeing of the pupils effectively. They take well-informed decisions and take action designed to further the school's aims and promote its ethos. Their effective self-evaluation informs the recently reviewed development plan. For example, leaders' effective oversight of the curriculum is based on lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. The knowledge derived from this monitoring process enables leaders to initiate actions and developments which support pupils' learning and progress in key areas such as reading and mathematics.
12. The school provides parents with required and regular information about the school. The school website provides details about school policies and the curricular and extra-curricular opportunities available to the pupils. The headteacher and other school leaders work collaboratively to produce a weekly online newsletter, supported by photos and videos, which provides parents with further information about their children's lives at school. Teachers provide parents with regular reports which give them helpful information about their children's academic progress and include guidance as to how their children can further develop their learning. Staff also make themselves available in the morning and at the end of the school day for informal discussions with parents and carers.
13. Effective risk assessment supports the pupils' safety and security. There is a suitable risk assessment policy which leaders and staff effectively implement. They risk assess areas of potential risk, such as the forest area and the swimming pool, and put in place appropriate mitigations. Leaders provide staff with guidance about conducting and writing specific risk assessments. Leaders ensure that the necessary checks are conducted in respect of any off-site facilities which the pupils use, such as adventure training centres. Leaders' management of risk assessment is subject to regular oversight by governors. Governors maintain a detailed risk register and review risk assessments for individual pupils to ensure their suitability.
14. Leaders provide parents with an appropriate complaints policy on the school's website. Leaders take prompt and suitable action in response to any complaints received. They maintain detailed records of all complaints, both formal and informal, and their responses.
15. Leaders maintain effective links with external agencies, such as speech and language therapists and children's services. Leaders also maintain an appropriate accessibility plan which is reviewed each year and updated as required. Leaders ensure that the school does not discriminate against any pupils and that it meets the requirements of the Equality Act (2010).
16. Leaders of the early years provide staff with effective training and guidance to support them in planning activities which are stimulating and ensure the children make good progress. Leaders provide the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results to the local authority on request.

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 comprehensive and carefully planned curriculum is well matched to the pupils' ages and abilities. Leaders monitor the curriculum carefully and adapt schemes of work to ensure that they provide appropriate support for the pupils and well-structured subject content that goes beyond the age-related expectations of the national curriculum. For example, leaders have allocated additional time to English in order to develop pupils' reading skills. This has had a beneficial impact in other subjects, such as mathematics, where pupils' abilities in solving word problems have been strengthened. Effective use of specialist teaching and outdoor learning further enhances the pupils' academic experience.
19. Early years teachers successfully teach children the sounds that letters make and extend their vocabulary. In numeracy, staff build children's understanding of number beyond ten and their ability to recognise and name three-dimensional shapes. Staff make effective use of resources in the classroom and outdoor play area and model appropriate, subject-specific language in dialogue that encourages children to listen and think carefully. As a result, children develop their speaking and listening skills well and speak confidently to adults. Children make good progress and, by the end of Reception, they have attained levels of understanding which enable them to move confidently into Year 1.
20. Teaching is typically well planned and teachers demonstrate a thorough understanding of their subject matter. They use a range of effective teaching methods and activities to extend pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. They make effective use of the forest area, for example, to teach younger pupils about invertebrates and why they are beneficial for the soil. Teachers encourage pupils to make links between their learning in different subjects. For example, older pupils are encouraged to apply their understanding of symmetry and pattern in art. Pupils show interest in their work and apply thought and effort so they can make progress. They contribute confidently and articulately to discussions using mature, relevant language. However, there is some inconsistency in the quality of teaching. In the most successful lessons, activities are well planned to provide pupils with appropriate levels of challenge and class time is used effectively. These qualities are not always evident, though, and in such lessons pupils' progress is not as good as it is typically across the school.
21. Leaders employ a suitable assessment framework comprising standardised tests, marking of pupils' work and the award of effort and attainment grades each half term. Leaders analyse this information carefully and use it effectively to plan curriculum development. Pupils benefit from constructive and supportive written and verbal feedback from their teachers. When pupils find tasks challenging and have difficulty understanding concepts, informative guidance from their teachers enables them to make progress.
22. Leaders use information from pupils' previous schools and assessment by their teachers to identify those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Based on this data, leaders develop appropriate individual action plans to meet individual pupils' needs. The support in class which leaders provide for pupils who have SEND enables them to make good progress from their starting points.

23. The few pupils in the school who speak English as an additional language (EAL) do not require any additional support for their English. However, the school's approach to early identification enables the school to provide support for pupils who speak EAL, should this be required.
24. Leaders provide a broad range of extra-curricular activities which are available in the morning before school starts, during the lunch break and after school. These activities include, for example, chess, robotics and mountain biking. Pupils engage enthusiastically in these activities which enable them to acquire new interests and develop their physical and intellectual skills in these areas.

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 successfully promote the school's core pastoral values of compassion for others, generosity of spirit and appreciation of friends, family and the wider world. As a result, there is a warm, welcoming atmosphere in the school and pupils show respect for each other, adults and visitors to the school. Through assemblies, form periods and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons, pupils learn about different types of healthy relationships and the harm caused by prejudice and discrimination. As a result, pupils learn to consider the importance of acknowledging and respecting that people can see the world from different perspectives.
27. Leaders strive successfully to promote pupils' emotional wellbeing and build their confidence and self-esteem. Leaders celebrate pupils' achievements in academic, sporting and creative activities and their acts of kindness to others in assemblies and share these with parents and the wider community in weekly newsletters posted on the school's website. Leaders organise an effective mindfulness programme to support pupils' positive mental health. If pupils have concerns or worries, they have trusted adults, including trained counsellors, who provide prompt and supportive guidance. Leaders also provide specially designated quiet spaces where pupils can relax, talk to others and seek advice.
28. Leaders provide training for staff in implementing the behaviour management scheme with the result that school rules are consistently applied. Pupils respond positively to the rewards system, including an effective use of strategies such as house points, and the recognition and rewards these bring. Staff model appropriate behaviour and help pupils involved in any behavioural incidents to reflect on their behaviour, apologise when appropriate and learn how to avoid such conduct in the future. As a result, pupils' behaviour is typically calm, constructive and courteous.
29. Appropriate supervision of the pupils further promotes their typically good behaviour. Leaders ensure that the required adult-to-pupil ratios are maintained in the early years. During breaktimes and extra-curricular activities, leaders deploy staff appropriately to support the pupils in their play and recreation.
30. Pupils learn about the world's major faiths, which supports their understanding of differing beliefs and spiritual practices. Leaders further promote pupils' appreciation of the non-material aspects of life through art, music, drama and literature.
31. Leaders provide a carefully structured and effective programme of relationships and sex education (RSE). This meets the requirements of current statutory guidance and covers suitable topics such as the key features of healthy relationships, the negative impact of pornography, understanding of puberty and the importance of respecting privacy and consent. Such topics are taught in an age-appropriate way and leaders consult parents about the programme so that they can ask questions and share their ideas with teaching staff.
32. Pupils learn about the links between physical and mental wellbeing and the importance of healthy eating, rest and exercise through an effective PSHE education syllabus which is taught by suitably trained staff. Teachers support pupils in developing appropriate personal goals, resilience and understanding of how to use technology responsibly.

33. Adults plan suitable activities which help early years children to develop their physical skills successfully. Creative activities using paints and modelling dough, gardening and playing with tyres and bicycles support children in developing their co-ordination, physical strength and teamwork. In physical education (PE) lessons, children practise running and jumping, learn how to swim and develop their hand-eye co-ordination.
34. Pupils successfully develop their sporting abilities and co-ordination skills through well-planned PE and games lessons. They learn how to play football, hockey, cricket and netball and effective teaching develops their grasp of tactics and teamwork. Leaders enable the small number of female pupils in Years 7 and 8 to play sport with Barrow Hills' partner senior school, King Edward's Witley, so that they experience effective coaching and have the opportunity to play in matches.
35. Leaders ensure the admission and attendance registers are maintained as required by current statutory guidance. They provide effective training for staff about the school's registration procedures. The school attendance champion monitors and evaluates attendance data, taking appropriate action in the case of any concerning levels of absenteeism. Leaders provide the local authority with timely information regarding any pupils who leave or join the school outside normal transition points.
36. Leaders ensure there is suitable accommodation to provide for pupils' medical needs and any medicines are safely stored. Suitably qualified staff trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid, support pupils who are injured or unwell and administer first aid and medication appropriately when required.
37. Leaders promote pupils' physical wellbeing through effective management of health and safety and fire safety, supported by external audits. Regular fire evacuation drills and lockdown drills ensure that pupils know how to respond appropriately in the event of an emergency. Leaders implement regular checks and maintenance, including of fire safety equipment, to ensure the premises and accommodation are suitable for pupils' use and that all regulatory requirements relating to health and safety are met.

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

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

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

39. Through assemblies, form periods, PSHE education lessons and extra-curricular activities, pupils learn about key values, such as individual freedom and respect for different beliefs and opinions, which underpin British democracy. In PSHE education lessons, older pupils learn about the rule of law both in Britain and in the international context. They are taught, for example, about their rights as children within the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Discussion of topics such as press freedom and the right to an education support development of pupils' understanding of right and wrong.
40. Staff teach pupils about issues relating to rights and responsibilities. They explore why rules are needed and the key features of democratic societies. Leaders provide them with suitable opportunities to practise democracy in school. For example, children in the early years vote on which book they would like to have read to them at the end of the day. Pupils from Reception to Year 8 elect form representatives to serve on the school council and the whole school votes each year on which charity to support.
41. Staff support early years children in learning social skills such as sharing and taking turns calmly. This enables children to play together constructively and complete different challenges successfully. Through their participation in these activities and in extra-curricular clubs, such as gardening and chess, children learn how to work together, resolve differences and develop their understanding of fair and courteous treatment. Staff help the children become more independent through establishing consistent routines, such as when collecting their whiteboards and pens to take part in lessons.
42. Staff support pupils in participating in and contributing to the wider community. Children in early years visit a local care home to read with the residents and show them work they have completed in school. Older pupils take part in litter-picking and gardening to maintain the public footpaths in the forested area around the school. They also support younger pupils from local schools when taking part in athletics events and art projects.
43. Leaders ensure that pupils develop an understanding of financial and economic matters. Children in early years learn about money through the numeracy curriculum and while engaging in imaginative play in the 'shopping' roleplay area. Older pupils organise activities to raise funds in support of national and local charities, including a local food bank, and are responsible for managing the money collected. They take part in an enterprise project when they are given a small sum of money and then have to collaborate with their peers to design and make a variety of goods which are sold in support of local charities.
44. Staff provide pupils with opportunities to take on leadership roles and contribute positively to school life. Pre-prep pupils act as environmental captains and vice-house captains. Year 8 pupils are appointed to the positions of *head boy* and *head girl* and take responsibility, amongst other duties, for organising and chairing meetings of the school council. Other members of Year 8 are appointed as captains to take responsibility for other aspects of school life such as sport and the library.
45. Pupils learn about different career opportunities which might be available to them in adult life. Members of the police and fire service visit the school to speak to the pupils about their roles. A

programme of visiting speakers provides information about the work of people such as engineers and scientists.

46. Leaders support pupils in preparing for the next stage in their education. Pupils benefit from a moving up day in the summer term each year during which they can visit their new classroom and spend time with their form teacher for the subsequent year. In Year 6, pupils are given advice about the schools to which they might apply and guidance about likely expectations of senior and secondary schools. The school provides older pupils with examination preparation lessons and interview practice.

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

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

Safeguarding

48. Leaders prioritise safeguarding and ensure that it is managed effectively. The safeguarding policy and procedures meet current statutory requirements.
49. Safeguarding leaders complete appropriate training for their role and ensure that all members of staff receive suitable safeguarding training, including at induction. Staff receive a weekly update to keep them informed of any safeguarding concerns and safeguarding is on the agenda for weekly staff meetings. As a result, staff are confident that they know how to respond to any concerns, including those arising from a pupil disclosure or relating to adults at the school.
50. The safeguarding team responds effectively whenever safeguarding concerns are raised. They maintain effective links with external agencies, including the local authority and children's services. Leaders make prompt referrals to these agencies when required and keep appropriate records of any safeguarding issues that have arisen and the school's responses to these.
51. Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Leaders ensure effective filtering and monitoring of the school's internet and respond in a timely manner to any potentially inappropriate usage.
52. Leaders implement suitable safer recruitment procedures effectively. No adult begins work in the school before all the mandatory checks have been satisfactorily completed. Leaders maintain a suitable single central record of appointments (SCR) which accurately records the checks that have been carried out.
53. Governors complete annual safeguarding training which helps them to maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. The safeguarding governor visits the school each term to check that the staff have appropriate knowledge of safeguarding procedures. He also reviews the SCR and staff personnel files, to ensure they are properly maintained, and interviews pupils. Leaders report to the governors each term on safeguarding matters and governors carry out an annual review of safeguarding arrangements. Leaders revise the school's safeguarding policy each year in line with statutory guidance and this receives formal approval from the governing body.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

54. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Barrow Hills School
Department for Education number	936/6104
Registered charity number	311997
Address	Barrow Hills School Roke Lane Witley Godalming Surrey GU8 5NY
Phone number	01428 683639
Email address	info@barrowhills.org
Website	www.barrowhills.org
Proprietor	Bridewell Royal Hospital
Chair	Mrs Justine Voisin
Headteacher	Mr John Towers
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	197
Date of previous inspection	14 to 17 June 2022

Information about the school

55. Barrow Hills is an independent co-educational day school located in the village of Witley in Surrey. The school is overseen by a board of governors known as The Court of Bridewell. The current headteacher took up his post in September 2023.
56. There are 38 children in the early years comprising two Nursery classes and one Reception class.
57. The school has identified 70 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
58. The school has identified English as an additional language for 12 pupils.
59. The school states its aims are to provide excellent academic teaching and pastoral care, engender strong moral and personal qualities in pupils and enable them to both discover and realise their talents.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

3 to 5 June 2025

60. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

61. 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.

62. 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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