

School inspection report

24 to 26 March 2026

Akeley Wood Senior School

Bycell Road

Akeley

Buckingham

MK18 5AE

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. The school is a supportive community in which pupils are known well as individuals. Leaders promote a culture centred on respect, inclusion and responsibility. Leaders maintain consistent routines and clear expectations, which support calm, purposeful learning. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning and contribute constructively to the school community. Leaders and staff actively promote pupils' wellbeing so that they approach their education with confidence.
2. Leaders and governors fulfil their responsibilities through defined roles and systematic oversight of the school's work. Governors provide appropriate challenge and draw on a suitable range of evidence, including through scrutiny of documentation and regular meetings with senior staff. Leaders evaluate the educational provision carefully and ensure that the Standards are met consistently.
3. Leaders provide a broad and well-planned curriculum that is supported by an effective assessment framework. Teaching enables pupils to engage and develop their understanding. Assessment information is used to support pupils' individual needs effectively. As a result, pupils typically make good progress over time. However, in a few instances, lessons do not provide sufficient challenge or build on pupils' prior learning effectively. This means that, in these lessons, pupils' progress is not supported as well as it could be.
4. Staff promote pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing through structured pastoral systems, established routines and appropriate supervision. Leaders set clear expectations for behaviour that staff implement consistently. Pupils behave responsibly and respectfully, demonstrating positive attitudes to their learning. Leaders and staff support pupils' wellbeing and teach them to seek help when needed. Leaders systematically monitor and promote pupils' positive attendance and engagement with their education.
5. Leaders support pupils' secure understanding of social responsibility. Pupils develop independence and leadership skills through well-considered opportunities to contribute to school life and the wider community. They demonstrate respect for others and an understanding of how to make a positive contribution to global and British society.
6. The school provides pupils with suitable careers guidance overall. Senior pupils receive a broad and coherent careers programme. However, the careers programme for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is not as thorough. This means that these pupils do not, at this stage, receive a sufficiently broad understanding about future career pathways.
7. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders maintain a vigilant safeguarding culture. Staff receive appropriate training and understand how to respond to, and report, concerns in line with Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE). Leaders maintain secure safeguarding records and work effectively with local safeguarding partners.

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 all lessons build on prior learning and provide appropriate challenge so that pupils make consistently good progress
- strengthen the careers programme for pupils in Years 7 to 9 so that they are more clearly informed about a wider range of potential career opportunities.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders provide a clear vision for the school centred on kindness, respect and community. They promote pupils' wellbeing effectively through assemblies, well-established mentoring and pastoral systems, and by promoting the values of inclusion, tolerance and respect through the school's 'Akeley diploma'. As a result of these measures, leaders cultivate a school culture that enables pupils to approach their education positively, confidently and with enjoyment.
9. Governors work closely with senior leaders to provide effective oversight and assure themselves that they have the skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities competently. Governors ensure that they know the school well through regular visits, scrutiny and evaluation of the school's development plan and by meeting with key staff, such as the school's safeguarding and health and safety leaders. This structured and collaborative approach by leaders and governors means that the Standards are met consistently.
10. Leaders ensure that staff implement policies consistently across the school. They provide parents with a range of required and useful information, mainly through the school's website. Leaders review policies regularly and ensure that these are made available to parents and staff so that the school's practices and procedures are understood well. Parents receive written reports and attend regular parents' meetings so that they are informed about the progress their child is making.
11. Leaders implement thorough systems to identify, manage and mitigate risk. Detailed risk assessments cover the school's premises and accommodation and a wide range of off-site educational activities and excursions. Staff receive specific training that enables them to develop and implement well-considered and suitably robust risk assessments. An external consultant scrutinises risk assessments to check that they consider and mitigate risks effectively. Leaders have carefully assessed potential risks relating to digital technology and pupils' use of mobile phones. Leaders and staff evaluate risk assessments thoroughly after trips have taken place in order to identify any near misses or lessons learned, so that risk assessments continue to be suitable.
12. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The school maintains a suitable accessibility plan that seeks to make the school's premises and educational provision accessible for pupils. Leaders, for instance, adapt the curriculum and provide strategies and resources that help and support pupils to participate fully in school life. Leaders ensure that the school's provision does not disadvantage or discriminate against individual pupils or groups.
13. Leaders build and maintain constructive and positive links with a range of external agencies and local safeguarding partners so that the school's provision continues to support pupils consistently and effectively. The school notifies the local authority appropriately when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points. Leaders consult with the local authority about the financial arrangements relating to pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
14. Leaders provide parents with a suitable complaints policy that includes a three-stage process and clear timescales. Leaders manage any formal complaints that are submitted in line with the policy, keeping full records of any meetings, actions and resolutions.

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

15. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

16. Leaders plan and implement a broad and suitable curriculum that is matched carefully to pupils' ages, aptitudes and needs. For example, pupils follow a broad curriculum in Key Stage 3, progress to a wide range of GCSE options and, in the sixth form, undertake personalised A-level pathways that are supported by enrichment programmes. As a result of the well-planned curriculum, pupils make good progress in their work. Senior pupils achieve well in their GCSE and A-level examinations.
17. Leaders monitor the curriculum thoroughly to ensure that it continues to be suitable for pupils and meets their needs effectively. For instance, they use a range of strategies, including work scrutiny and lesson observations, to evaluate the quality and consistency of the curriculum and the wider educational provision. This oversight is complemented by departmental meetings in which subject leaders review outcomes and plan developments. Leaders regularly consult with pupils about the curriculum so that it continues to meet their needs effectively.
18. Teachers typically draw on their good subject knowledge, plan lessons carefully and use clear explanations and probing questions to build on pupils' prior learning. For example, pupils identify and explain grammatical patterns during Spanish lessons. Pupils analyse paintings in geography and use their prior knowledge to explore how these images reflect the changing social context within the local area. In science lessons, pupils learn about gametes and demonstrate responsible learning attitudes when they engage confidently and sensitively with the topic. However, in a few lessons teachers do not consistently build on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding or provide sufficient challenge so that pupils' progress is supported as effectively as it could be.
19. Leaders promote a culture that supports pupils to take increasing responsibility for their learning. Teachers provide structured opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback and refine their work. In art lessons, for example, pupils build on their prior knowledge by developing graphite shading into more sophisticated tonal work and lino-printing. In design and technology (DT) lessons, pupils apply their prior learning by undertaking more challenging design and production processes. Teachers help pupils to identify and address areas where further understanding is required so that they develop and extend their knowledge and skills effectively.
20. Leaders implement a systematic assessment framework to monitor and track pupils' progress. Staff draw on baseline data and regular assessments to analyse pupils' attainment and take effective actions in response. Teachers provide clear guidance to pupils so that they understand the work they do well, and the steps they need to take to make progress. This helps pupils to refine their work, such as when they improve their range and use of vocabulary in English and structure responses more effectively in geography examination questions.
21. Leaders provide effective and thorough support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff receive detailed information and use effective strategies and resources to support pupils' individual needs. For instance, they provide pupils with reading pens, coloured overlays and enlarged text, as appropriate. Leaders and staff meet regularly to review the progress of pupils who have SEND and to revise their provision. Pupils who have SEND make good progress during their time at the school.
22. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive the help that they need. Leaders assess these pupils carefully and provide appropriate and effective support that meets their

individual language needs. Staff provide pupils with targeted vocabulary lists, visual cues and regular and structured speaking opportunities during lessons. They routinely check pupils' understanding and ensure that pupils continue to receive suitable support. Pupils who speak EAL develop increasing fluency and confidence in their use of written and spoken English.

23. Leaders provide a broad range of extra-curricular opportunities through lunchtime clubs and a well-developed enrichment curriculum. Pupils participate in activities such as drama and sports clubs. They collaborate and develop leadership skills, for example by leading warm-ups, officiating games and supporting peers. Pupils improve their musical skills by joining ensembles and choirs and develop self-esteem and confidence by performing in public. Pupils develop presentation and musical skills through their participation in a music technology club. A homework club provides a calm and supervised environment for pupils to complete their work after school.

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

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

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

25. Leaders and staff prioritise pupils' emotional wellbeing and provide them with comprehensive and supportive pastoral systems. These include a wellbeing hub and designated calm and quiet areas of the school where pupils can take time to pause and reflect. Individual pupils can access support and advice by collaborating with staff to identify positive and potentially more challenging lessons and activities. Staff help these pupils by providing them with strategies and guidance so that they approach challenging situations confidently. Leaders routinely review pastoral records and share information with staff so that pupils are supported consistently and effectively.
26. Leaders promote a culture of inclusion and moral awareness throughout the school. Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons, tutor discussions, assemblies and the wider curriculum support pupils' understanding of the importance of treating others kindly and respectfully. For example, pupils participate and consider different viewpoints in moral debates that explore, for example, whether shared agreement is a necessary aspect of friendship.
27. Leaders implement a well-planned PSHE curriculum that includes a suitable relationships and sex education (RSE) programme. The school consults with parents in advance of teaching potentially sensitive topics. Sixth-form provision includes themed days led by external experts on topics such as positive sexual health and digital safety. Younger pupils are supported to understand key aspects of personal development, including healthy friendships, respect and kindness. The curriculum promotes pupils' awareness of their personal wellbeing, enabling them to develop an age-appropriate understanding of how to manage their feelings and make informed decisions. Staff receive specific training so that the PSHE curriculum is taught consistently across the school.
28. Pupils are provided with suitable opportunities to develop their spirituality. During morning registration and form-time periods, pupils participate in wellbeing and reflection activities. Pupils reflect on their thoughts, feelings and experiences, which contributes to their spiritual development and enables them to develop self-awareness and confidence. These opportunities are further extended through the outdoor learning provision, where pupils participate in weekly sessions such as orienteering, low ropes and fire and den building, promoting reflection, resilience and an appreciation of the natural environment.
29. Leaders promote pupils' physical health through a suitably broad programme of physical education and games. Pupils participate in a range of sports, including badminton and team games such as basketball and netball. They are encouraged to engage at a level that is appropriately matched to their ability. Leaders arrange a broad range of competitive fixtures through which pupils learn to participate in sport respectfully and inclusively. Pupils play sport supportively and develop a secure understanding of the importance of taking regular exercise.
30. Leaders set high behavioural expectations and implement the behaviour policy consistently. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's mobile phone rules. Leaders support pupils' understanding that unkind and discriminatory behaviour causes hurt and distress. The school implements a robust anti-bullying policy that promotes kindness, inclusion and respect towards others. Leaders maintain detailed behaviour and bullying records, review these carefully for any patterns or trends and take prompt and suitable actions in response. The school's alert and vigilant approach to managing pupils' behaviour includes supportive and thorough supervision. Staff remain

visible and approachable during breaktimes and unstructured parts of the school day so that pupils can quickly seek support, when required.

31. Leaders with responsibility for health and safety have a secure understanding of their responsibilities to maintain the premises and accommodation so that they remain suitable for pupils. They perform regular visual checks and take prompt and effective actions when any maintenance issues are identified. Staff demonstrate a secure understanding of how to report any health and safety concerns. The school maintains a suitable fire action plan and implements thorough fire safety procedures. Pupils regularly rehearse fire drills so that they know how to evacuate buildings in case of an emergency. A suitable number of staff are trained as fire wardens. Leaders maintain effective health and safety arrangements across the school.
32. The school's first aid and medical arrangements are appropriate. Well-qualified staff manage the first aid and medical procedures competently. They maintain clear records of accidents and injuries and the administration of any medication.
33. Leaders maintain admission and attendance registers in line with current statutory guidance. Staff record attendance consistently and follow up pupils' absences promptly. Leaders analyse attendance information to identify any concerning patterns and take prompt and suitable actions that promote positive levels of attendance.

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

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

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

35. Leaders provide pupils with appropriate and well-planned opportunities to learn about cultural diversity and to consider the importance of inclusion and individual choice. Assemblies, PSHE lessons and the wider curriculum help pupils to understand values such as democracy, law and order and mutual respect. Pupils participate in quizzes that include questions about contemporary global issues. They celebrate Black History Month, learn about inspirational female role models and discuss equality and characteristics that are protected by law, such as sexual identity, race and religion. The school commemorates Remembrance Day, and pupils explore the consequences for society when democracy breaks down. Pupils learn to be tolerant and respectful and are prepared well to make a positive contribution to British and global society.
36. The school's careers provision is suitable overall. Senior pupils attend a local careers fair that informs them about potential opportunities and pathways. Pupils in the sixth form are provided with individual guidance so that they make informed decisions about university or apprenticeship options. Leaders arrange opportunities for senior pupils to meet a broad range of people who represent different jobs and careers. However, the careers provision for pupils in Years 7 to 9 currently lacks cohesion and is underdeveloped. This means that these pupils do not, at this stage, receive a suitably thorough careers programme that provides them with clear guidance about potential future careers and pathways.
37. Pupils develop a secure understanding of finance and economic decision-making through PSHE and curriculum activities, including learning about bank accounts, budgeting and responsible spending. Pupils' economic understanding is enhanced by a programme of educational visits and enterprise projects. For instance, they visit local businesses, including manufacturing, sporting and recycling organisations, and gain insight into production, sustainability and business operations.
38. Pupils are provided with impartial and balanced information about British and global politics and institutions. They participate in mock elections and learn about the main British political parties. Pupils develop a secure understanding of the democratic process, including the role of government and Parliament. They engage confidently with current affairs through activities such as news discussions and quizzes. Staff organise visits to RAF Hendon and Bletchley Park that further broaden pupils' awareness of national institutions and public services, supporting their understanding of how such organisations contribute to society.
39. Leaders manage transition points carefully so that pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education. Staff meet and share detailed information about pupils before they move into new year groups so that their individual needs continue to be understood and supported.
40. Leaders provide a well-developed range of opportunities for pupils to contribute to the life of the school through assuming leadership roles. Senior pupils undertake positions of responsibility linked to wellbeing and diversity. They lead assemblies and other initiatives which broaden pupils' understanding about a range of topics. For instance, they organise a Holocaust Memorial Day which promotes a culture of inclusion and respect. Through such roles, pupils develop their leadership skills and positively contribute to and promote the school's inclusive ethos.

41. Pupils contribute positively to the lives of others beyond the school and develop their understanding of social responsibility through, for example, participating in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) and providing voluntary service to others. In the sixth form, pupils contribute to community volunteering initiatives through a structured enrichment programme, known in the school as the 'AW6 programme'. Through these volunteering experiences, pupils support a range of charitable activities and fundraising initiatives. As a result, pupils develop empathy, resilience and a clear understanding of how to be active and responsible members of society.

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

42. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

43. Leaders implement robust safeguarding arrangements that reflect current statutory requirements. Appropriately trained safeguarding leaders maintain a safeguarding culture in which staff remain vigilant and prioritise the safeguarding of pupils in their daily practice.
44. Governors maintain thorough oversight of the school's safeguarding procedures, including through regular meetings with the safeguarding team, scrutiny of relevant documentation and visits to the school. Governors undertake appropriate safeguarding and safer recruitment training, enabling them to provide informed, supportive and effective oversight.
45. Leaders manage contextual safeguarding risks effectively, including those linked to online activity and new technology. Pupils learn how to be digitally responsible through well-planned PSHE lessons. Leaders invite the police to attend school assemblies to inform pupils about how to promote their personal safety when online. The school restricts pupils' use of mobile phones during the school day. Leaders maintain and review internet filtering and monitoring systems regularly. Staff follow clear procedures when any online concerns arise and review alerts promptly.
46. Those with designated safeguarding responsibilities meet regularly to carefully discuss and consider the decisions and actions that they take. Safeguarding records are kept in accordance with current statutory guidance. Leaders identify concerns promptly and review them systematically. They work closely with a broad range of external agencies and local safeguarding partners so that vulnerable pupils receive the help and support that they need. Leaders monitor any low-level concerns that are reported about adults who work at the school so that they are able to track patterns and take early and appropriate actions.
47. The school provides pupils with a range of effective ways to seek support, if required. For example, pupils can visit the pastoral hub and wellbeing centre to share any concerns they may have with the school's pastoral team.
48. Leaders provide regular safeguarding training so that staff have a secure understanding of the school's safeguarding practices. Staff are trained to respond effectively to potential risk, including those linked to online safety, mobile phone use and the use of AI. Leaders meet with staff regularly to provide safeguarding updates and to inform them about any ongoing and emerging safeguarding concerns. Staff record pastoral and safeguarding concerns promptly, enabling leaders to take prompt and effective action.
49. Safer recruitment procedures are secure and monitored by leaders and governors. Leaders complete all required pre-employment checks on staff, governors and volunteers, and record these accurately on a suitable single central record of appointments (SCR).

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Akeley Wood Senior School
Department for Education number	825/6015
Address	Akeley Wood Senior School Bycell Road Buckingham Buckinghamshire MK18 5AE
Phone number	01280 814110
Email address	seniorschool@akeleywoodschool.co.uk
Website	www.akeleywoodschool.co.uk/senior-school
Proprietor	Blenheim Schools Group Limited
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Mrs Eleanor Holding
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	406
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 February 2023

Information about the school

51. Akeley Wood Senior School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils situated in Buckingham. It forms part of Akeley Wood School, which provides continuous education from nursery to sixth form across three school sites. In January 2026, the school joined the Blenheim Schools Group Limited, which provides governance and oversight. Both the chair of governors and the headteacher assumed their current positions in September 2023.
52. The school has identified 117 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
53. The school has identified that a small number of pupils speak English as an additional language.
54. The school states that it aims to inspire a community of global citizens who feel empowered to be active and socially aware. It seeks to develop pupils' characters by encouraging them to be adventurous and collaborative and to prepare well for their futures. The school endeavours to promote the values of resilience, charity, kindness and respect.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

24 to 26 March 2026

55. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The onsite inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

56. 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.

57. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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