

# School inspection report

29 April to 1 May 2025

# Wisbech Grammar School

Chapel Road Wisbech PE13 1RH

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 demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to implement policies effectively. Decision-making is focused on the wellbeing of pupils in order to promote and sustain a cohesive school community. Consequently, leaders provide a wide range of opportunities for all pupils which helps to boost their academic and personal development.
- 2. Leaders and directors have undertaken a structured self-evaluation when formulating their 'Aspire 2029' strategic plan. This has involved conversations with main stakeholders to support operational planning and mitigation which is evidenced in the ongoing risk assessment. This scrutiny, as well as regular oversight from the advisory governors, ensures that policies are effective and suitable to the school context. However, at the beginning of the inspection not all the required information, such as previous inspection reports, was made available to parents on the website. This was rectified during the inspection.
- 3. Leaders have facilitated a curriculum, which puts the pupils' abilities and aspirations at its heart. Underpinned by effective careers provision, senior school pupils make evidence-informed choices about which subjects will be most helpful in developing the skills they need for the future. School leaders ensure that departments in the senior school and class teachers in the prep school support the progress of individual pupils. However, the approach to analysing achievement data is not consistent across the whole school and results in a lack of clarity when identifying trends in the performance of different groups.
- 4. Lessons are well planned and have a quiet focus, with pupils determined to engage in all the activities provided. Pupils appreciate the bespoke feedback provided by teachers and are keen to push their learning further.
- 5. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are suitably supported due to adaptive teaching, effective support by teaching assistants and individualised specialist support, where appropriate. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
- 6. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) make good progress. School leaders ensure that individualised support is effective and that pupils can fully access the curriculum.
- 7. The policies and systems in place to support safeguarding are robust, including suitable record keeping and referral procedures. Safeguarding leaders ensure that all staff are appropriately trained and understand the part they play in supporting pupils' wellbeing and safety. The vigilant safeguarding team report regularly to directors who carry out effective oversight.
- 8. There is a wide-ranging sports, creative arts and curriculum enrichment programme, which puts pupil choice at its core. Pupils are encouraged to run events and to be actively involved in the delivery of clubs. As a result, pupils benefit; they are self-motivated, passionate and keen to improve upon their knowledge and skills.
- 9. There is a culture of collaboration and openness which permeates every interaction in the school and ensures that pupils feel safe and secure in their environment. British values, such as the importance of mutual respect, are promoted within each class and covered through a

- comprehensive personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum and suitable relationships and sex education (RSE) in each phase.
- 10. Pupils of all ages behave very well. A suitable anti-bullying strategy is in place and is well understood by pupils and staff. Rare incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with swiftly and focus on meaningful reflection opportunities.
- 11. Boarding pupils, who come from China, live in well-appointed and well-run houses which have a noticeable family atmosphere. The cohesive sense of community within the two boarding houses is demonstrated through the range of activities and support mechanisms provided. Pupils thrive in this caring and nurturing environment. However, these boarding pupils are not consistently well integrated into the wider school community during the school day.
- 12. The school provides numerous opportunities for pupils to support others in a frequent and sustained way both within the school community and the local community of Wisbech. Consequently, pupils develop key skills such as social responsibility, leadership and collaboration to help them make progress towards becoming engaged British citizens.
- 13. The careers provision is comprehensive and centred on providing suitable information and support at the appropriate time. Provision begins within PSHE in the prep school and becomes more directed to individual pupil aspirations in the senior school. The wellbeing of pupils is central to this and ensures that curriculum content informs pupils' future related decisions.

### 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:

- check systematically to ensure that all the required information is consistently made available to parents
- develop a more consistent school-wide approach to analysing tracking and assessment data to improve pupils' progress.
- enable closer integration of boarding pupils into the wider school community.

### Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

- 14. Leaders demonstrate the skills and knowledge to carry out their responsibilities effectively. There is a culture of promoting community and opportunity, which leaders place securely within their 'Aspire 2029' plan. Throughout the school, there is an atmosphere of warmth, friendliness and teamwork which supports pupils' wellbeing. Leaders ensure that all staff are suitably qualified and trained through a robust record-keeping and professional development system.
- 15. The directors play an active role in the strategic direction of the school through effective oversight and regular visits. They ensure leaders apply their knowledge and skills effectively so that the standards are met. Directors challenge and provide support with matters of health and safety, safeguarding and the single central record of appointments.
- 16. Leaders ensure a systematic and appropriate self-evaluation process through thorough risk assessment to ensure the provision meets the needs and safety of the pupils. Risk assessments identify potential hazards thoroughly and put forward sensible control measures to mitigate these. Risk assessments are used for trips and visits, and these are regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain suitable and effective.
- 17. Leaders actively promote the wellbeing of pupils through focusing on the holistic nature of education and the need for appropriate pastoral support. This is seen through the effectiveness of 'the measured mile' for pupils to use as well as the recent creation of 'The Space', a wellbeing hub for the school community. This provision makes pupils feel secure and supported in challenging moments. The pastoral care is effective through a pastoral system focused on multi-agency support and supportive conversations.
- 18. Boarding provision is well managed and effective. Pupils benefit from a caring and supportive environment which recognises and celebrates pupils' home culture while supporting them in sharing it with others. Leaders have systems in place to ensure boarders feel safe and secure, including in homestay arrangements.
- 19. Leaders in the early years actively promote the wellbeing of the children in the setting. They model positive behaviours and help children to recognise feelings and develop self-regulation. They have a working knowledge of the statutory framework and provide a curriculum across the seven areas of learning.
- 20. The school's values and ethos are well promoted across the school. There is a strong sense of community forged through the celebration of difference and conversations focused on seeing life from different perspectives. This happens within assemblies, in the PSHE curriculum and in RSE, as well as in whole-school events and themed weeks.
- 21. There is an appropriate accessibility plan in place and the school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders liaise effectively with external agencies and provide the relevant local authority with required information concerning any pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan, including that related to funding.
- 22. Leaders implement a suitable complaints policy and procedure. Leaders respond swiftly and effectively to any concerns that are raised. A strong ethos of communication and openness underpins interaction with parents, ensuring that most complaints are resolved at an early stage.

23. Parents receive feedback on their child's progress, both academically and pastorally, through regular reporting and parents' evenings. Most of the required information is available on the school's website. However, not all previous inspection reports were available on the website at the start of the inspection. This oversight was rectified during the inspection.

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

# Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

- 25. The curriculum in both the prep and senior schools is reviewed and adapted regularly to meet the needs of pupils. In the prep school, specialist teaching is in place for subjects such as science, German, art, geography and drama, and the transition to senior school is facilitated by subject continuity and collaboration. For example, English departmental leaders have introduced the study of Shakespeare to the Year 5 curriculum to stretch the pupils and to ensure a smoother transition to a more challenging curriculum. In the senior school, curriculum review is an annual process, with adjustments made to subject choices and qualifications offered to reflect cohort size and interest. For example, BTEC qualifications and a level 3 diploma in criminology have been introduced. The pupils' individual skills and aspirations are central to reaching bespoke curriculum decisions. Within the GCSE curriculum, for example, there are fewer compulsory options, to enable greater individual choice.
- 26. Schemes of work are comprehensive and implemented effectively, with links made between subjects and real-life applications explored. These are underpinned by an emphasis on pupil oracy and a discursive approach which allows pupils to develop their literacy, linguistic and metacognitive skills. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and deliver well-planned lessons. Regular departmental time allows colleagues the opportunity to share good practice in a meaningful way and ensure consistency within teaching practice. Departments support the use of technology, which helps pupils to efficiently navigate and manage their work. Teachers use classroom discussion well to help pupils deepen their learning, such as in a Year 8 geography lesson on earthquakes where technical terms are used fluently.
- 27. Pupils of all ages make good progress, are enthusiastic learners and look to the future with confidence. Teachers are knowledgeable about their pupils' academic abilities and aspirations. This ensures that lessons are tailored to the needs of every child. However, there is not currently a school-wide analysis of baseline and progress data, which limits the detailed understanding of progress by individuals and specific pupil groups.
- 28. Leaders of academic departments encourage regular dialogue between teachers and pupils so that pupils understand their academic performance and how they can improve. Reports to parents clearly show how well their child is performing. For example, within Years 7 to 9, reporting focuses on pupils' mastery of curriculum content and attitude to learning. Pupils are empowered by this approach, which recognises and reports their efforts effectively.
- 29. In most lessons, pupils are engaged in the learning and take responsibility for their progress. For example, within the Year 7 English curriculum, pupils embark upon self-differentiated activities on dystopian themes, while in Year 9 biology they select their level of revision exercises, demonstrating an awareness of their attainment and future progression. Lessons encourage creativity, as shown in the Year 3 and 4 production, *Pirates and Mermaids* as well as in the role-playing activity in Reception on *Three Little Bears*. Enrichment opportunities, such as the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and additional mathematics, are offered within a comprehensive sixth-form programme. Where opportunities for collaboration are provided, pupils work enthusiastically and confidently with their peers.
- 30. Pupils who have SEND are well supported within the classroom and speak confidently about their progress. Support is targeted through an effective pupil passport system that considers the pupils'

- aptitudes and emotional wellbeing. Considered individual support strategies are implemented effectively in lessons. The use of teaching assistants and technology fully support this provision. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress and feel confident in their studies.
- 31. School leaders ensure that pupils who speak EAL have the additional support required to fully access the curriculum, and this informs planning within the classroom and boarding environment. This is achieved through effective baseline assessment and regular monitoring. Within lessons, pupils are supported through use of technology to support real time translation. However, within the classroom, some boarders are not always well integrated into learning activities.
- 32. All children in early years reach their early years goals, with communication and language needs met. The structure of the curriculum allows children to build their competences through free play, while obtaining a secure grasp of age-appropriate arithmetic knowledge and understanding of letters and the sounds they represent. Within a literacy lesson, for example, children were encouraged to contextualise a story about a bear and use their own knowledge to supplement the story. This was explored in pair and group discussion, enabling children to improve their communication skills and further their own learning through insightful questioning. This developed into a physical activity where children found bears in different habitats, helping them to develop their fine and gross motor skills.
- 33. Leaders ensure a clear and wide-ranging programme of recreation activities which prioritises pupils' communication skills and wellbeing. The afternoon activities programme in the senior school helps pupils in developing self-confidence and self-esteem as they choose from a wide range of activities such as young engineers, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, music rehearsals and crochet, as well as committees such as 'the forum' or the charity committee. These opportunities often enable them to mix with pupils from other year groups and learn new skills.

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

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

- 35. The PSHE and RSE curriculums explore a range of suitable topics that are appropriate to the lives of pupils and respond to contextual safeguarding issues. For example, in Year 7, pupils have recently covered material on healthy relationships and can articulate how this builds on their prior learning and how this informs their connections with others outside the classroom. Consequently, pupils understand the importance of respecting and celebrating the differences of others.
- 36. Pupils are well known by their teachers and supported by an effective pastoral system. There is a suitable system of rewards and sanctions which promotes reflection and gives pupils the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and to self-correct. Consequently, pupils behave well, are friendly, kind and respectful to each other and actively support each other's wellbeing. Pupils of all ages learn about bullying within the PSHE curriculum. Bullying incidents are rare but, should they occur, pupils are confident that staff respond promptly and effectively.
- 37. A strong understanding of child development ensures that children's personal and social development sits at the heart of the early years curriculum and provision. Children therefore learn quickly to self-regulate and collaborate, allowing for strong relationships with peers and staff to be formed. Children therefore feel safe and secure and develop an understanding of their own emotions and those of others.
- 38. Pupils develop their spirituality through regular visits to the local church. For example, both the start and the end of their school journeys are celebrated in a formal service. Spirituality is also explored in the religious studies curriculum, where pupils are encouraged to appreciate other faiths, such as Judaism in Year 7. In Year 6, pupils in small groups are encouraged to discuss aspects of Sikhism through well-directed questioning. School leaders ensure that pupils improve their understanding of different types of spirituality, while developing their own.
- 39. Physical education strikes a balance between an enthusiasm for traditional team sports and a desire to be inclusive and focus on developing pupils' self-confidence. The curriculum is based on collaboration rather than compulsion, with older pupils deciding on their level of engagement. This in turn helps them to manage their time and self-regulate. Within the prep school, pupils demonstrate good hand eye co-ordination and have regular opportunities to collaborate with their peers. In a Year 1 dodgeball lesson, a fast pace enabled multiple skills to be developed, and pupils regulated their emotions effectively when competing with others. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 experience specialist guidance from physiotherapists, so that they are empowered to better their personal performance. Furthermore, all within the school community are encouraged to regularly attempt a 'measured mile' of exercise in their own time, demonstrating the school's focus on physical wellbeing for all its pupils.
- 40. All premises, including the boarding facilities, are clean and well maintained. Leaders ensure that the school site meets all health and safety requirements, and they actively engage with risk assessments, putting in mitigations to lessen any risk. Fire safety arrangements are effective, with suitably trained staff and appropriate risk assessments in place. Regular fire drills, including in boarding time, ensure the whole school community is prepared in the case of fire. There is an effective system of supervision across the school site to keep pupils safe and in the early years

- children are always within sight or sound. School leaders prioritise the security of the school site and there are suitable systems, such as external lighting, in place to ensure the safety of pupils.
- 41. Boarding pupils are well known, safe and happy within their environment. Homestay arrangements are appropriately checked before placement and monitored throughout the agreement. Food is of a high standard, nutritious and sufficient for pupils' wellbeing and drinking water is freely available. Leaders provide opportunities for those who board to learn important life skills, such as food hygiene and basic cooking from the head chef, or garment care from house staff. The boarding community is supportive and cohesive but pupils who board have limited social interaction with day pupils both within and outside the structured curriculum.
- 42. Medical provision is appropriate, and all medication is stored and handled effectively. The onsite medical centre is staffed during the school day by appropriately trained staff. Serious incidents are recorded on a digital system to enable leaders to look for patterns and identify additional risk. There is a detailed accessibility plan which thoroughly considers the need to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with a disability, as set out in the Equality Act 2010.
- 43. Leaders ensure that admissions and attendance registers are kept secure, and in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders follow up on any anomalies carefully and inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times of the year.

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

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

- 45. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to support initiatives within the local community; pupils value the benefits these bring to others and understand that community-based initiatives help their own personal development. Children in the early years regularly visit a care home, the prep school supports Ukraine through a shoebox appeal, and the wider school community is involved in regular food bank initiatives. Within the physical education curriculum, all pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 study first aid for three weeks. This empowers pupils to support others when in need. These activities help pupils to work towards becoming dutiful, responsible and engaged British citizens.
- 46. The PSHE and RSE programmes promote pupils' respect for the law and public institutions. Across the curriculum, pupils discuss current issues, are respectful of differences and are mindful of cultural context. This approach starts in Reception where children host a visit with pupils and parents from China so that they can compare their school and wider life experiences. Coverage of social and political issues can also be observed within lessons. Curriculum content, such as learning about migration in geography or artists from around the world in art, encourages pupils to reflect on lives which are very different to their own and informs their understanding of current global issues.
- 47. Pupils fully engage with British values and realise their importance within society. Their views are developed through themed weeks, assemblies and events. For example, recent events on 'Stephen Lawrence Day' and the 'Pride fair' celebrate difference and promote respect for others. Pupils are proud of their involvement in such events and want to make a difference. Democratic processes are evident in a recent senior school mock election and pupils actively consider current local and global issues. For instance, Year 5 pupils recently wrote to a former prime minister to highlight their worries about sustainability. Pupils are encouraged to deepen their moral understanding within lessons. For example, in Year 7, pupils consider ideas about right and wrong in the consideration of the Messiah principle in current times; pupils also explore gender equality principles and employment law when constructing a job advert.
- 48. Economic education is well established within the PSHE curriculum; pupils speak confidently about their learning and its application to real life scenarios. Older prep school pupils learn about tax and budgeting and in the senior school pupils gain information about how to manage money and how student loans work. In Year 7, pupils enjoy creating a business proposal and presenting to a panel of investors. This enables pupils to engage with economic concepts meaningfully and for a clear purpose.
- 49. Leaders have systematically reviewed the careers provision in the school, creating a sequential and spiralling programme across the prep and senior years. Pupils in Year 5 learn about different careers and workplaces, both locally and nationally, such as dental hygienists and fire fighters. Pupils in Year 6 engaged positively with the recent careers fair. In Year 7 pupils explore bespoke programmes that provide up-to-date careers guidance and enhance their learning further in small group discussions. Pupils in Year 12 understand how to plan their futures and recognise the clear guidance from the school.
- 50. Leadership opportunities for pupils are widespread across all phases in the school, as seen in the elected pupil body known as 'the Forum' for the prep and the senior school. Boarders have opportunities to communicate their experience to boarding staff within house meetings and there is

a well-respected and robust prefect system which provides leadership opportunities for pupils. Pupils can address the pupil body on issues which interest and engage them such as in a recent themed day alerting the school community to the issue of period poverty. This is indicative of pupils' ease and maturity in dealing with sensitive issues, as well as the support of leadership in promoting pupil initiatives.

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

## **Safeguarding**

- 52. Appropriate systems are in place to ensure that safeguarding practice is robust and consistent across the school. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities have suitable skills and knowledge and work effectively with external agencies. Any referrals for pupils of concern are prompt, well managed and show a good understanding of local thresholds. Safeguarding records are secure, thorough and show the rationale for decisions made in each case. Any concerns about adults, including low-level concerns, are dealt with promptly, are carefully recorded and indicate appropriate contact made with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Any trends have been identified and have fed into future training opportunities.
- 53. Safeguarding leaders train staff effectively and leaders ensure that there is capacity for mentoring, mutual support and professional development within the safeguarding team. Safeguarding forms an integral part of the induction process, and all staff receive regular updates from safeguarding leaders. Staff training is in line with the Cambridgeshire local authority, with safeguarding leads aware of contextual safeguarding issues such as county lines and online safety.
- 54. The PSHE and RSE curriculums address potential dangers, such as child-on-child abuse and online safety. As a result, pupils can articulate their learning about keeping themselves safe. Pupils confidently use a variety of ways to report any concerns which they have, including anonymous reporting. School leaders ensure that there are effective systems in place to monitor and filter pupils' internet activity. These systems are regularly tested to ensure their efficacy.
- 55. Directors oversee the implementation of the school's safeguarding policy and procedures effectively. The chair of the board of directors has responsibility for the oversight of safeguarding and is appropriately trained in safeguarding at the advanced level. The chair provides strategic updates to the board of directors and liaises closely with safeguarding leaders in the school.
- 56. School leaders carry out timely and effective recruitment checks on staff and governors before they commence work at the school. All checks are recorded in an appropriate single central record (SCR). The chair regularly checks the record and staff files to ensure that recruitment practice is secure.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

### **School details**

School Wisbech Grammar School

**Department for Education number** 873/6013

Address Wisbech Grammar School

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Website www.wisbechgrammar.com

**Proprietor** Wisbech Grammar School Ltd.

**Chair** Mr Jai Liu

**Headteacher** Mr Barnaby Rimmer

Age range 2 to 19

Number of pupils 589

Number of boarding pupils 36

**Date of previous inspection** 10 to 13 and 25 to 26 May 2022

### Information about the school

- 58. Wisbech Grammar School is an independent day and boarding school founded in 1379 and located centrally within the town. The school consists of four sections: an early years setting for children aged 2 to 5; a prep school for pupils aged 5 to 11; a senior school for pupils aged 11 to 16; and a sixth form for those aged 16 to 19. The proprietor is a limited company with a board of directors who oversee the work of school leaders, supported by an advisory committee. In September 2024, the school opened 'The Space', a wellbeing hub for all members of the school community.
- 59. Two boarding houses were established in September 2019 and cater for pupils from mainland China. A small number of these pupils are in homestay agreements. All boarding pupils are in Years 9 to 13.
- 60. The school has nursery provision for 24 children aged 2 to 4 and a Reception class for 11 pupils aged 4 to 5.
- 61. The school has identified 87 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). There are nine pupils in the school who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- 62. The school has identified English as an additional language for 37 pupils.
- 63. The school states its aims are to put the pupils at the heart of everything it does. It seeks to create opportunities for pupils to develop educationally and discover who they are, both within the classroom and in its wider provision. The school endeavours to produce a community and environment that supports pupils to continually develop and aims to celebrate all academic endeavour and academic excellence collectively.

### **Inspection details**

#### **Inspection dates**

29 April to 1 May

- 64. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The onsite inspection was quality assured by a monitor.
- 65. 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.
- 66. 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.

### **Independent Schools Inspectorate**

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For more information, please visit isi.net