

School inspection report

20 to 22 January 2026

Burgess Hill Girls

Keymer Road

Burgess Hill

West Sussex

RH15 0EG

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 maintain efficient oversight of the school. They ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively and that the requirements of the Standards are met consistently. Leaders prioritise the wellbeing of pupils in the actions that they take, in line with the school's ethos and values. They undertake their responsibilities effectively.
2. Leaders have created a curriculum that covers a broad range of subjects and meets the needs and aptitudes of pupils. The curriculum is complemented by a well-resourced co-curricular programme, which benefits pupils of different ages and abilities. The programme is wide ranging and well co-ordinated. It supports pupils' skills, interests and personal development effectively.
3. Teachers know their pupils well, have good subject knowledge and use a range of activities, resources and feedback to help pupils to learn effectively. The youngest pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. However, in the senior school, the strategies which are identified to support older pupils who have SEND are not always consistently applied.
4. Pupils' mental, emotional and physical health are well supported. Pupils are responsible and respectful. Behaviour is good and bullying is rare. The programme of physical activities supports pupils' physical and mental wellbeing. The curriculum, together with the co-curriculum and assemblies, actively promotes pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. Leaders have a systematic approach to the management of health and safety, including fire protocols. Appropriate first aid is readily available when required.
5. In the early years, leaders design purposeful, appropriate programmes that link movement, regulation and early learning. This successfully promotes children's physical, social and emotional development along with their communication and language skills.
6. Boarding provision is carefully led and managed by knowledgeable and experienced staff. Conscientious supervision and a rigorous approach to safety ensure that boarders feel safe.
7. Pupils are well informed and prepared to make financial decisions. They understand the importance of tolerance and respect for others. Pupils benefit from a well-structured careers education programme at the upper end of the school, which enables them to make informed choices about their next steps. However, this programme is less well developed in the younger years of the senior school.
8. Governors maintain a rigorous oversight of safeguarding practices at the school. Staff understand and implement the school's procedures for reporting any safeguarding concerns that might arise. Leaders carry out recruitment checks as required by current statutory guidance and these are recorded appropriately. Pupils learn how to keep safe, including when online.

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 strategies to meet the needs of pupils in the senior school who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are consistently applied in order to improve their progress
- improve careers education in Years 7 to 11 so that pupils in these years are better informed, in an age-appropriate way, about potential further education, training and career options, in readiness for their next steps.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders and managers have the required knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively, including actively promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Governors assure themselves that the Standards are met by effective scrutiny and monitoring of the school's practice and procedures. They receive detailed reports, regularly visit the school and review documentation. They provide appropriate challenge and support to leaders.
10. Leaders have an accurate view of the effectiveness of the school and areas for further development. They carefully consider the impact that their actions have on pupils' wellbeing and success. They are methodical and detailed in their self-evaluation, which informs their strategic school development planning. This planning focuses on improving the impact on pupils' wellbeing in all areas of the school's provision.
11. Leaders manage any parental complaints appropriately and keep thorough records of these and any actions taken by the school in response. Complaints are dealt with within the timeframes stated in the school's policy.
12. Parents receive reports that provide them with information about their child's attainment, progress and attitudes to learning. Required information about the school, including its aims and ethos, is made available to parents, largely through the school's informative website. The school annually reviews the provision for any pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) and provides local authorities with appropriate information related to funding and finance.
13. Leaders are knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities related to boarding. For example, they ensure that new members of the school undergo an effective induction process, allowing them to settle in quickly and understand the school's expectations and procedures. Boarding routines and practice are well communicated. This enables new pupils to benefit readily from staff who are knowledgeable about boarding provision.
14. Leaders are committed to supporting the youngest children to have the best start in their learning and development. They ensure that there is a well-resourced and planned learning environment that supports the children's curriculum. Staff are knowledgeable about the needs of children and the requirements of current statutory guidance. They ensure that children are well prepared to transition into Year 1.
15. Leaders have a comprehensive and robust approach to risk management. They have an effective understanding of physical, welfare and safeguarding risks and respond with urgency and diligence to mitigate areas of potential risk when these are identified. Risk assessments evaluate potential risks thoroughly and detail the appropriate steps taken to reduce or remove these. Leaders systematically monitor risk assessments to check their continued effectiveness.
16. Leaders foster close links with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils. In particular, they maintain an effective working relationship with local safeguarding partners. Leaders inform the local authority of pupils who leave and join the school at non-standard transition points.
17. Leaders implement a detailed accessibility plan to enable access to the curriculum and facilities for all pupils, for example by the adjustment of lessons and the adaptation of entrances and exits. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. The curriculum is broad and balanced. It supports pupils in developing a wide range of knowledge and skills across many subject areas. Leaders have designed the curriculum to be age-appropriate, responsive to pupils' aptitudes and to prepare pupils for their futures. It ensures that there is sufficient planning to help pupils develop important foundational skills. For example, in mathematics the curriculum plans precisely to support pupils' reasoning and numerical fluency. In English and modern foreign languages, the curriculum plans to support pupils' linguistic skills.
20. Leaders regularly review the curriculum and refine schemes of work so that learning is relevant. For example, there are also a host of opportunities for pupils to engage with modern ways of working with new technologies, to develop digital fluency and to develop independent study skills. Leaders enrich this curriculum in a range of ways such as, for instance, enriching the English and reading curriculum through prep school library sessions and paired reading with older pupils.
21. Teachers plan and structure their lessons well, build on pupils' prior knowledge and have ambitious expectations of their pupils. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use high-quality learning resources that support pupils' needs and abilities and facilitate a range of activities. Across the school, literacy and verbal fluency are supported through teachers' questioning, discussion, analytical writing, presentations and reading across genres. As a result, pupils engage confidently with core skills and understand how to improve through their understanding of clear success criteria and teachers' feedback. This builds a secure foundation for progress across wider subject areas.
22. Learning environments are calm, purposeful and well organised, allowing pupils to respond positively to the high expectations set for them. Pupils are interested in their work and learn attentively. They take growing responsibility for their learning and are keen to achieve highly.
23. Teachers check pupils' progress through regular tests, tasks in lessons and longer assessments. Departments use standardised assessment information to identify when pupils are not making the progress anticipated and provide them with additional support. There is a consistent approach to feedback which helps pupils identify their areas of success and their next steps. Pupils learn and achieve well across the school, including attaining well in their GCSE and A-level examination courses. Most pupils go on to study at universities with the vast majority securing places at their first-choice destination.
24. Leadership ensures that pupils who have SEND are supported through planned adjustments and the appropriate deployment of staff. Leaders provide teachers with a variety of teaching strategies about how to adapt lessons. In most lessons, adaptive and responsive teaching enables pupils to participate meaningfully. Pupils who have SEND are supported to engage confidently, sustain attention and experience success. However, in the senior school, these strategies are not consistently applied and as a result, pupils do not learn as effectively and make less progress in some subjects.
25. Leaders ensure that pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are identified promptly and that their individual needs are met through inclusive, collaborative practice. Many subjects provide bilingual glossaries and word banks so that pupils who speak EAL can access lessons successfully to make academic progress. As a result, pupils who speak EAL access the full curriculum

increasingly independently, are supported effectively in their academic language development, and progress well over time.

26. Leaders ensure that communication and language needs in early years are met through intentional modelling and carefully structured interactions. Leaders develop early communication skills through systematic phonics teaching, delivered with multisensory strategies such as flashcards, actions, sound cues and storytelling. Alongside this, by encouraging quality conversation, staff facilitate purposeful talk and children gain rich opportunities to develop spoken language. Children grow in confidence to express themselves through conversational turn-taking and to pronounce words accurately. Together, these approaches create a language-rich early environment where communication is nurtured, enabling children to make secure progress in speech, listening and foundational literacy.
27. Leadership provides a broad and inclusive programme of recreation and enrichment that complements curricular learning and supports pupils' wider development. This includes a wide range of co-curricular activities and performance opportunities across music, sport and the creative arts. Boarders benefit from a planned programme of trips, activities and integration events in the evenings and at weekends. The views of pupils are used to refine provision and introduce new opportunities, including newer activities such as padel. Consequently, pupils develop confidence, teamwork, leadership and resilience, while engaging enthusiastically in opportunities that support individual growth.

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

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

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

29. Leaders embed the school's ethos through high expectations, inclusive practice and a culture of belonging. Leaders promote a culture of respect within a supportive community with clear expectations for how pupils treat one another. Pupils celebrate individuality, understand and value diversity and maintain respectful relationships in their day-to-day interactions. Leaders support pupils' moral development through clear expectations and opportunities for reflection.
30. Leadership promotes pupils' confidence and self-awareness through a supportive culture and wide opportunities for success. Clear reward systems, enrichment activities and performance opportunities support participation and progress. Pupils apply creative and physical effort confidently, including solo performance opportunities for more confident pupils and scaffolded participation for others. Pupils readily provide each other with the chance to showcase their learning and support them by taking turns and nominating each other to provide examples of individual successes. Pupils develop self-belief and grow in confidence through both everyday learning and wider achievement.
31. Physical education (PE) is inclusive and responsive to the views of pupils. The curriculum across the school is well designed and resourced to support progress for all. Informed by a baseline assessment of key skills, pupils' progress is tracked and monitored. Fitness data is used to inform targeted support for individual pupils. Pupils are supported through targeted coaching and opportunities both inside and outside of school, and an array of competitive experiences. As a result, pupils develop physical competence, resilience and teamwork.
32. Leadership places an emphasis on pupils' understanding of personal development. In personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), pupils learn about nutrition, mental health and risks associated with alcohol. The relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum teaches pupils about intimate relationships and consent in age-appropriate ways. This supports pupils' understanding of changes as they grow and how to manage relationships respectfully.
33. Leaders have an effective behaviour policy and anti-bullying strategy, which are well understood by pupils. Staff respond quickly to resolve any incidents and support pupils involved. Leaders reinforce expectations through assemblies, house rules and structured daily routines. In PSHE, pupils learn about the different types and effects of bullying and why bullying is not acceptable. Leaders ensure that pupils experience a calm and respectful school.
34. Leaders provide well-maintained and suitable premises and accommodation, including in the boarding house, to promote the welfare of pupils. Leaders ensure that all the necessary health and safety procedures and documentation are both thorough and regularly reviewed. This approach is effective in identifying and managing risks. Medical care is provided by a qualified school nurse and appropriately trained staff, including staff with paediatric first aid training. Medical care is recorded appropriately. Effective supervision inside and outside lessons ensures pupils are appropriately supported.
35. Leadership ensures that boarding arrangements are managed effectively. The boarding house is well maintained, clean and warm, and is appropriately furnished. Facilities are of a high quality, with a kitchen available for food preparation and access to snacks. Laundry arrangements are efficient,

with additional independence for sixth-form pupils. Bedrooms are welcoming and can be personalised, with noticeboards provided and appropriate arrangements in place to keep belongings safe and tidy. Boarders are aware of who to contact if they need help, and staff are accessible and responsive both during the school day and in boarding.

36. Leaders ensure that suitable and accurate admission and attendance registers are maintained. Patterns of absence are monitored and resolved where required. Leaders inform the local authority of any attendance concerns and of pupils who leave and join the school at non-standard transition points. This helps to promote the safety and wellbeing of pupils.
37. Leaders design a curriculum that supports children's physical development and emotional readiness. An array of daily opportunities, such as PE, imaginative role play and yoga, develop children's fine motor skills, strength, hand control, co-ordination, and communication skills and self-management. As a result, children gain confidence and build secure foundations for learning.

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. Leadership actively promotes respect and inclusion through whole-school initiatives such as 'Identity Day', the 'Prism' lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pupil group, 'Ally Week' and culturally responsive boarding menus and celebrations. Assemblies, tutor-time discussions and curriculum content address contemporary and historical themes such as migration and identity. Events marking Christmas, Diwali, Hanukkah, Holi and Ramadan, often with contributions from parents, create authentic opportunities for pupils to learn about and value diverse traditions and perspectives. As a result, pupils gain an informed understanding of society and diversity, show respectful curiosity and empathy, and participate confidently within a cohesive and diverse school community.
40. Leadership strengthens pupils' social and economic understanding through a structured digital citizenship and PSHE curriculum, complemented by meaningful opportunities for community engagement. In an age-appropriate way, pupils learn about topics such as taxation, business and student finance. Pupils learn about adult life, which enables them to make informed choices and understand their role in society. Pupils demonstrate an awareness of the social and economic dimensions of wider society.
41. Leaders ensure that important values are embedded across lessons, assemblies and daily school life. These values are enriched through practical opportunities. For example, leaders provide democratic experiences such as elections and voting, and whole-school initiatives focused on democracy. As a result, pupils demonstrate an understanding of democratic processes and respect for others. Pupils demonstrate readiness to engage responsibly with society and show respectful attitudes.
42. Classroom discussions encourage pupils to explore choices, consequences and empathy, and consistent routines reinforce responsibility. When pupils make poor choices, restorative conversations help them understand the impact and repair relationships. As a result, pupils develop a secure sense of right and wrong, demonstrate consideration for others and contribute to a calm, ordered community.
43. Leaders provide comprehensive careers guidance through PSHE lessons, assemblies and visiting speakers. This provision is well developed for pupils in Years 12 and 13. Leaders provide effective support and guidance related to further education, training and employment. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 learn about subject choices and areas of work. However, the careers guidance for pupils in these younger years is not as fully developed and less systematic in its delivery. As a result, some pupils do not develop a rich, age-appropriate understanding of the range of potential further education, training and career options available to them in the future.
44. Leadership develops pupils' agency by giving them positions of responsibility and a meaningful voice in school life. This provides opportunities for pupils to shape facilities and play spaces through their suggestions. Through pupil-led charity initiatives, participation in Youth Parliament roles, and responsibilities in boarding, pupils become self-managing, and take ownership of their conduct and contribution. They demonstrate reliability, initiative and a growing sense of personal responsibility and are prepared for life in modern British society.
45. Leadership forges local links to deepen pupils' civic understanding, ensuring they experience connection with the community around them. Pupils take part in opportunities such as visits to local

care homes, partnerships with the community pantry and meetings with the local MP. As a result, pupils learn to appreciate their locality, contribute to it positively and recognise their responsibilities as considerate neighbours and active citizens.

46. Leadership designs appropriate experiences for children in the early years that actively foster children's social and community awareness. Opportunities are provided for class voting to develop their understanding of shared decision-making. Collaborative projects such as creating displays, alongside inclusive celebrations of different faiths, develop their social understanding and awareness. A walk to the nearby library and local war memorial, as well as harvest collections and cards for care-home residents, further develop children's sense of connection and contribution. As a result, children practise turn-taking, empathy and co-operation, developing early social responsibility and an emerging understanding of their role within the wider community.

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. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities respond promptly and appropriately to any safeguarding concerns that arise. They consult with external safeguarding partners and refer safeguarding concerns to them when appropriate. Suitable arrangements for handling concerns about adults are in place. These are well understood by staff and followed when required. Leaders keep suitable records of safeguarding concerns, including the decisions and actions taken in response.
49. Governors maintain an effective overview of the safeguarding policy and procedures. They conduct thorough reviews of safeguarding practice at the school. All governors undertake appropriate training in safeguarding.
50. Safeguarding induction and training for staff, including that for the safeguarding team, are thorough, regular and in line with local and statutory requirements. Leaders provide safeguarding updates and scenario-based training for all staff, followed by quizzes to review understanding. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and escalate concerns when required.
51. Leaders are aware of the contextual risks and challenges facing pupils beyond the school, including risks relating to radicalisation and extremism. This understanding is used to inform staff training and the development of the PSHE curriculum.
52. Leaders provide a number of ways for pupils to raise any concerns that they might have. Pupils know who they can approach if they wish to share any concerns. The availability and the role of the school's independent person are known to boarders.
53. Leaders ensure that all appropriate safer recruitment checks on adults who work with pupils or reside in boarding houses are made in a timely manner. These are accurately recorded in a suitable single central record of appointments (SCR).
54. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Suitable internet filtering and monitoring procedures are in place. These systems are tested regularly by the school. Any alerts are immediately reviewed by members of the safeguarding team, who respond as required.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Burgess Hill Girls
Department for Education number	938/6201
Registered charity number	307001
Address	Burgess Hill Girls Keymer Road Burgess Hill West Sussex RH15 0EG
Phone number	01444 241050
Email address	reception@burgesshillgirls.com
Website	www.burgesshillgirls.com
Proprietor	Burgess Hill School for Girls Company
Chair	Dr Simon Thornton-Wood
Headteacher	Mrs Heather Cavanagh
Age range	2 to 19
Number of pupils	432
Number of boarding pupils	41
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 February 2023

Information about the school

56. Burgess Hill Girls is an independent day and boarding school for female pupils. The school is a charitable trust whose trustees also take on roles on the board of governors. The school comprises: a nursery, for female and male children aged 2 to 3 years; a pre-prep and prep school, for pupils aged 4 to 11 years; a senior school, for pupils aged 11 to 16 years; and a sixth form, for pupils aged 16 to 18 years. Previously the nursery, pre-prep and prep school were inspected at the same time as each other but separately from the senior school and sixth form. The current headteacher was appointed in June 2024. The chair of governors took up this role in September 2025.
57. There is one boarding house for female boarders aged from 11 years, which is located on the same site as the school.
58. The early years comprises three Nursery classes for 83 children and one Reception class for 7 children. The nursery is co-educational.
59. The school has identified 52 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
60. The school has identified English as an additional language for 23 pupils.
61. The school states its aims are to provide excellent academic provision, extensive co-curricular opportunities, innovative programmes, outstanding careers education and early years support. The school further aims to foster confidence, moral responsibility, strong partnerships and a mutually supportive community, underpinned by high-quality staff and forward-thinking facilities. Through these, the school aims to empower pupils to reach their full potential and lead fulfilled, productive lives in a rapidly changing world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

20 to 22 January 2026

62. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

63. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- 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 the boarding house accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

64. 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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