

School inspection report

2 to 4 June 2026

The Downs, Malvern College Prep School

Brockhill Road

Colwall

Malvern

WR13 6EY

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 and governors are experienced and knowledgeable. They place pupils' wellbeing at the centre of decision-making and ensure that pupils' academic, emotional and pastoral needs are met. Leaders evaluate the school's provision effectively and identify areas for future development. Governors provide effective support and challenge, helping to ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively and that the Standards are met consistently. As a result, the school successfully promotes its ethos of being a happy and welcoming community where pupils are fulfilled and experience success.
2. The curriculum is carefully planned across the school and reflects the school's aim to provide a stimulating and challenging learning experience. Teaching is planned well to meet the needs of individual pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers use precise teaching strategies in most subjects so that pupils develop their learning skills and improve their work. Through ongoing feedback, teachers identify how pupils can make further progress. As a result, pupils achieve well.
3. Boarding is integrated successfully into the life of the school and reflects its caring ethos. Boarders are well cared for by trained staff, benefit from positive relationships and enjoy a range of activities that contribute to their wellbeing and personal development. Accommodation is well maintained and provides a comfortable and welcoming environment. Leaders ensure that the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools are met.
4. Children in the early years benefit from a well-resourced and nurturing environment. Carefully planned provision and effective teaching support children's learning, development and wellbeing across all areas of learning. Consequently, they develop confidence, independence and secure foundations for the future.
5. Leaders promote pupils' physical health, emotional wellbeing and personal development effectively. Pupils behave well throughout the school, displaying courtesy and impeccable manners. Staff use restorative measures and reflection time to help pupils understand the importance of learning from mistakes when the need arises. Effective health and safety arrangements help to ensure that pupils are safe, well cared for and able to thrive.
6. Leaders provide a personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme, including relationships and sex education (RSE), which promotes positive mental health and emotional wellbeing. However, lessons are not consistently effective because the programme and resources do not always provide opportunities to consider in greater depth the skills and knowledge pupils need for their future lives.. Consequently, some pupils do not develop their understanding of the intended learning as effectively as they could.
7. The school encourages mutual respect and readies pupils to be positive participants in British society. Pupils accept differences and work together positively. Respect is modelled by leaders and informs the way pupils treat each other. Leaders have created a careers programme that introduces pupils to a range of possible pathways for the future.
8. Leaders fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively. Staff receive regular training and leaders maintain effective links with safeguarding partners. Safer recruitment checks are completed and

recorded accurately. Leaders maintain appropriate records and take effective action when concerns arise.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- strengthen the quality and consistency of the curriculum in personal, social, health and economic education and relationships and sex education, so that pupils develop a deeper understanding of the knowledge and skills they need for the future.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders and governors actively promote the wellbeing of pupils through the decisions they make and the culture they create. As a result, pupils are happy, confident and safe. Leaders are knowledgeable and skilled. They successfully promote the school's aim to provide a fulfilling education in a happy and supportive environment.
10. Governors' oversight of the school is effective and well structured. They know the school community well and bring expertise and experience into their oversight of leaders' work. Regular on-site visits and clearly assigned responsibilities mean that oversight is specific and effective. Governors ensure that the requirements of the Standards are met consistently.
11. Leaders are reflective and rigorous in their self-evaluation of the school. They routinely review the quality of provision and take effective action to bring about improvements. For example, leaders reviewed teaching and learning and introduced a set of principles to promote positive attitudes to learning. As a result, pupils are focused and engage in lessons.
12. Leaders ensure that provision in the early years is well led and managed. Staff are suitably trained and supported to meet children's needs effectively. They establish caring and effective routines that support children's wellbeing, independence and personal development. Leaders provide a well-resourced environment, with carefully planned activities and opportunities for purposeful play, which enables children to learn and develop successfully.
13. Leaders ensure that boarding provision is well led and managed. They appoint suitably qualified staff and provide appropriate training, so that boarding staff have the knowledge and skills to undertake their roles effectively. Leaders maintain a well-organised and welcoming boarding environment and monitor the quality of provision regularly. As a result, boarders are well supported and their welfare and wellbeing are promoted effectively.
14. Leaders adopt a systematic and thorough approach to the management of risk. Staff are comprehensively trained to identify and mitigate risk on the school site, in boarding accommodation and during off-site trips and activities. Leaders evaluate risk assessments regularly to ensure they take all reasonable steps to keep pupils and staff safe.
15. Leaders implement an appropriate complaints policy. Most complaints are resolved at an informal stage. Leaders manage any formal complaints in accordance with the published policy and maintain clear and detailed records, which include any actions taken and resolutions reached. Boarders understand how to raise concerns about their boarding provision and any concerns are recorded and acted upon appropriately.
16. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. There is an appropriate accessibility plan in place that is regularly reviewed. The plan ensures all pupils can access the site and benefit from the educational and recreational opportunities provided.
17. Leaders provide all appropriate information to parents and external agencies. Most policies are available on the school's website or on request. Parents receive detailed termly reports about their child's progress and attainment through an online parent portal. Leaders inform the local authority if pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times. Leaders also provide the local authority with

the required information about pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including information about finances and funding.

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 carefully planned and meets pupils' needs well. Leaders review and adapt the curriculum so that it is responsive to pupils' differing interests and aptitudes. The curriculum prioritises supporting pupils to develop secure foundational knowledge in reading, writing, mathematics and science. It also provides breadth across a range of subjects, including languages, humanities, technology, music, drama and art. The introduction of 'the Downs Malvern baccalaureate (TDM)' supplements the curriculum and provides opportunities for pupils to research, experiment and present on a topic of particular interest.
20. Teachers have secure knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. This enables them to explain new concepts clearly and to answer pupils' questions confidently. Teachers plan well-structured and effective lessons using a range of engaging resources that consider pupils' prior learning. When they are ready to achieve higher standards, pupils are challenged to think more deeply and solve challenging problems.
21. Strong relationships between staff and pupils throughout the school ensures that pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and participate actively in lessons. They are confident to offer an answer or ask a question when they are unsure. Pupils show resilience and perseverance when faced with a challenging concept, such as in mathematics when tackling geometry. Pupils take pride in their work and talk with enthusiasm about what they have learned, for example in English when they discuss characters in a literary text, showing empathy and understanding.
22. Pupils develop effective knowledge and skills in important foundational learning in reading, writing and mathematics. As they get older, they apply this learning across the curriculum and make good progress across the range of subjects. Pupils are typically successful in the school's internal examinations based on the Independent Schools Examination Board (ISEB) common entrance examinations and well prepared for the next stage of their education. Many pupils perform well in the entrance examinations for selective senior schools, with a proportion of pupils gaining scholarships to such schools.
23. Leaders identify pupils who have SEND effectively. They provide staff with guidance about individual pupils and how best to support their needs. In lessons, pupils are well supported to access the curriculum alongside their peers, including through bespoke support from teaching assistants where required. Leaders liaise effectively with external agencies and communicate regularly with parents to evaluate how well strategies are working and whether any changes are needed. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
24. Leaders provide structured provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). This includes assessing their needs when they join the school and providing tailored support, such as subject-specific word banks, so that pupils are able to access the curriculum effectively. As a result, pupils who speak EAL develop linguistic skills and access the curriculum successfully.
25. Leaders have implemented a carefully considered framework for assessment. They use a range of assessment information to establish pupils' levels of understanding and next steps in learning. Pupils receive frequent feedback from teachers in lessons, which helps them to improve their work. Feedback, both in lessons and from topic tests, enables pupils to correct misconceptions and to extend their knowledge and understanding.

26. Staff in the early years are knowledgeable about how young children learn and develop. They create a nurturing and purposeful learning environment that supports development across all areas of learning. Children develop confident language skills, using precise vocabulary, for example when describing what happens at the opticians. Staff ensure children are well supported to develop their early reading skills, letter formation and counting and number skills.
27. Leaders ensure that pupils of all ages benefit from a wide range of co-curricular activities that develop sporting, creative, technical and musical skills. These make use of the school's spacious country campus. Pupils are encouraged to try new activities and to make recommendations for new additions to the programme. A well-planned and interesting 'hobbies' programme is provided for day pupils and boarders on Saturdays. Pupils develop new skills through this provision, such as cyanotype printing, farming, coding and working on the school's own light railway.

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 have established a caring and supportive environment that places pupils at the centre of school life. Leaders help pupils to recognise their personal achievements and individual strengths. Through the school's 'skills to thrive' programme, pupils develop self-esteem, self-confidence and resilience, equipping them effectively for the future. Leaders provide a range of effective resources to support pupils' wellbeing. For example, pupils use a wellbeing hub and can talk to trained emotional literacy support assistants (ELSA) if they have concerns or worries. Staff know pupils well and work collaboratively to monitor pastoral needs, responding to emerging needs in a timely way when they arise.
30. Leaders promote pupils' spiritual development through opportunities for prayer and reflection, religious education and assemblies. Through these experiences, pupils develop an awareness of themselves and others. Time spent outdoors and caring for animals helps pupils to develop a connection with the natural world and understand their responsibility to care for the environment.
31. Leaders provide a PSHE programme that promotes positive mental health and emotional wellbeing. RSE forms part of the curriculum, through which pupils learn about healthy relationships and, as they get older, the changes associated with puberty. However, teaching is not consistently effective because the programme and resources do not always provide opportunities to consider topics in greater depth. As a result, some pupils do not develop a thorough understanding of the curriculum content as well as leaders intend.
32. Children in the early years are supported to identify and manage their emotions and develop their self-confidence. They are taught how to look after their physical health, such as the importance of visiting the optician. Staff provide a nurturing environment that provides a range of activities to support children's physical development. For example, children have well-planned activities to support them to develop gross motor skills, such as running and climbing, and to develop fine motor skills through drawing and painting.
33. The physical education (PE) curriculum is wide ranging and taught well. Pupils develop their skills across a variety of sports and activities, including competitive sport. The curriculum is enhanced by a diverse co-curricular and 'Saturday morning hobbies' programme, which enables pupils to develop their talents, acquire new skills and understand the importance of physical activity.
34. Pupils behave very well throughout the school, including at less structured times of the day and in boarding. The behaviour policy is understood and is implemented fairly and consistently. Pupils display exemplary manners, take responsibility for their actions and contribute positively to the school community.
35. Leaders implement an effective anti-bullying strategy. Pupils learn about bullying and what to do if they have concerns for themselves or others. Bullying incidents are rare and any that occur are dealt with effectively. Leaders support pupils to resolve friendship difficulties quickly through restorative approaches.
36. Boarding provision supports pupils' welfare and wellbeing effectively. Accommodation is well organised and clean, with appropriate social spaces, places to store private possessions, laundry

facilities and eating areas. Staff know boarders well and are always available to provide support and supervision. Leaders ensure that medical and physical health needs are met appropriately and that boarders are settled and well cared for.

37. Leaders take a systematic approach to maintaining health and safety requirements, including those related to fire safety. Procedures are comprehensive and well understood by staff, pupils and boarders. Regular checks, drills and risk assessments help to ensure that accommodation is safe and well maintained, including in boarding. Suitable medical facilities are available and overseen by appropriately trained staff. Leaders use external specialists to check on the appropriateness of their systems. Pupils are well supervised, including when the youngest children are eating.
38. The school's admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with current statutory guidance. Leaders monitor attendance closely and take appropriate action to support pupils to improve their attendance, when needed.

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

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

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

40. Pupils are taught effectively about fundamental British values, such as democracy. They learn about why such values matter through assemblies, 'chippy chats' at lunchtime and the PSHE curriculum. Pupils learn about government and the democratic process, including through elections to the school council and eco-council. They learn about the rule of law and the difference between right and wrong. Pastoral systems support pupils to reflect on the impact of their choices and actions. Consequently, they take responsibility for their actions and understand the importance of rules.
41. Pupils and staff work together to ensure that the school community is a happy and welcoming place for all. Pupils develop a thoughtful understanding of the wider world and learn about other cultures and backgrounds. For example, pupils compare their experiences with overseas pen pals who come from a different culture and background. As they get older, pupils understand the importance of developing balanced views when discussing issues. As a result, pupils are respectful towards others and understand the importance of respecting others in the community, local area and wider world.
42. Leaders plan carefully and in a variety of ways to support pupils' economic understanding. Pupils' understanding is developed through the well-planned and delivered mathematics curriculum and PSHE lessons. Pupils are given lots of practical opportunities to apply their learning to real-life situations. For example, children in the early years learn about money and how it is used to buy things. Older pupils apply their understanding by learning to budget and organising fundraising through enterprise and charity projects.
43. Through the connections leaders establish in the local community, pupils understand social responsibility and the importance of contributing to the community beyond the school. Many participate in joint ventures with local schools and organisations, for example concerts and charitable fundraising. Pupils contribute to a wide range of charitable endeavours in the local community and in the wider world, where they undertake research and select charities to support themselves. These activities promote pupils' understanding of the positive impact their individual and collective actions have on others.
44. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the range of opportunities they are given to take on leadership responsibilities in the school. For example, prefects follow an application process, including an interview with leaders. They prepare and lead assemblies for their peers. Many older pupils are table hosts for younger pupils at lunchtime. As well as serving the meal, they introduce the 'chippy chat' theme for table discussions. Through this, an ethos of service, as well as positive social interaction, is established.
45. Children in the early years are very well supported to develop their social skills in an age-appropriate way. For instance, shared breaks and lunch with older pupils in Years 1 and 2 teaches them to eat and play together and develop confident conversation skills. The youngest children develop emotional resilience and self-awareness as they learn to build positive relationships and respond appropriately to others.
46. Leaders prepare pupils well for the next steps in their education, through experiences such as visits to Malvern College when pupils take part in activities with staff and pupils there. Pupils in Years 7

and 8 receive helpful careers education, including an annual careers fair and talks from visitors about a range of possible future career paths.

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

47. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

48. Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding. They prioritise the wellbeing and safety of pupils in their decision-making. They ensure that policies and processes are well considered, aligned with statutory guidance and are available to parents on the school's website.
49. Leaders provide safeguarding training at induction and through regular updates and weekly meetings, including training in the 'Prevent' duty, which relates to the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Training equips staff with the knowledge to recognise and report on potential concerns, including low-level concerns about staff. Staff are vigilant and use appropriate procedures to report any concerns in a timely manner.
50. Governors maintain oversight of safeguarding policy and practice through a range of well-considered activities, including regular school visits and reviews of a range of documentation. Governors review a wide range of information related to safeguarding through regular reports from leaders. Collectively, governors provide leaders with timely support and challenge to undertake their statutory responsibilities effectively.
51. Safeguarding procedures in boarding are effective. Staff are well trained and readily available to boarders to support their safeguarding, welfare and wellbeing. Boarding staff liaise closely with school leaders to share information and respond to any concerns that arise. Boarders are given appropriate information about the contact details and ways to communicate with the independent person if they have any worries or concerns.
52. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding undertake their roles effectively. Leaders establish and maintain effective relationships with external agencies and safeguarding partners, such as children's social care teams. They take timely and effective action to keep pupils and boarders safe. Leaders use safeguarding records to identify patterns and emerging risks, so that they can take appropriate action to protect pupils.
53. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. They are provided with a range of ways to communicate any concerns, including anonymously through worry boxes or quick response codes. Pupils learn about how to stay safe online through assemblies, presentations and the curriculum.
54. Leaders use filtering and monitoring systems effectively, reviewing alerts and daily reports to identify potential risks associated with digital devices and online activity and respond promptly to any concerns.
55. Recruitment procedures are clearly structured and followed consistently. Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are completed before adults begin work with pupils. Pre-employment checks are recorded appropriately in the school's single central record of appointments (SCR).

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	The Downs, Malvern College Prep School
Department for Education number	884/6000
Registered early years number	EY298786
Registered charity number	527578
Address	The Downs, Malvern College Prep School Brockhill Road Colwall Malvern Worcestershire WR13 6EY
Phone number	01684 544100
Email address	information@thedownsmalvern.org.uk
Website	www.thedownsmalvern.org.uk
Proprietor	Malvern College
Chair	Mr Jonathan Penrice
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Nuttall
Age range	6 months to 13 years
Number of pupils	168
Number of boarding pupils	67
Date of previous inspection	14 to 15 June 2023

Information about the school

57. The Downs, Malvern College Prep School is a co-educational independent day and boarding school, comprising a pre-prep section for pupils in Reception to Year 2 and a prep section for pupils in Years 3 to 8. The school is a charitable trust, where trustees are responsible for all governance of the school and the charitable trust. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors has been appointed in July 2025.
58. The school offers full, weekly and flexible boarding options for male and female boarders in Years 3 to 8, in one boarding house located on the same site as the school.
59. There are four children in the early years, comprising one Reception class. There is also a separately registered early years setting, which is registered with Ofsted, called Mini Malvern Nursery, and provides for children under the age of four years old. It is located on the same site as the school.
60. The school has identified 54 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Seven pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
61. The school has identified English as an additional language for a small number of pupils.
62. The school states its aims are to provide pupils with a fulfilling education based on exploration, challenge and success, where they can investigate new experiences and discover their passions, developing skills and characteristics that support lifelong learning and set them on the path for continued success.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

2 to 4 June 2026

63. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

64. 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 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.

65. 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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