

# School inspection report

21 to 23 April 2026

## Highclare School

10 Sutton Road

Erdington

Birmingham

B23 6QL

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 staff create a purposeful environment that supports pupils' wellbeing, inclusion and academic development. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive, so that pupils engage in their learning with confidence, develop independence and take responsibility within the school community.
2. Leaders provide clear direction, supported by systematic monitoring and review. They identify priorities accurately and take appropriate action. Governors maintain suitable oversight of safeguarding, risk and strategic development, providing appropriate challenge so that the Standards are consistently met.
3. Leaders design a broad and carefully sequenced curriculum. Pupils develop knowledge and skills progressively and make good progress from their starting points. This is particularly evident in the early years and prep school, where pupils respond well to challenge and develop independence.
4. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress due to effective support. In the senior school, progress is secure overall. However, teaching does not consistently extend pupils with higher prior attainment so that in some subjects their progress is more limited.
5. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are able to access the curriculum and make good progress due to early identification on entry and the implementation of effective support.
6. Staff implement pastoral systems to support pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing. They apply clear expectations so that pupils understand how to manage their behaviour. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Where behaviour concerns arise in older year groups, staff respond promptly and reinforce expectations so that positive behaviour is maintained.
7. Leaders plan provision for pupils' social and economic education effectively. Through the curriculum and wider opportunities, pupils develop a secure understanding of responsibility and diversity and contribute positively to school life and the wider community, including through positions of responsibility. In addition, leaders have established a well-planned careers programme that supports pupils in exploring future pathways.
8. Leaders implement effective safeguarding arrangements so that the safeguarding culture is well understood and effective. Staff record concerns systematically and leaders review these regularly to identify patterns, including those linked to vulnerability and online activity. This supports timely and proportionate action, including engagement with external agencies where appropriate, so that pupils receive co-ordinated support.

## The extent to which the school meets the Standards

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

### Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that teaching in the senior school consistently provides appropriate challenge so that pupils, especially those with higher prior attainment, are routinely extended.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders provide clear and effective direction across the school. They implement well-established systems to monitor safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and curriculum provision. They review information from a range of sources to identify patterns, including those linked to vulnerability, attendance and online behaviour, and use this analysis to inform action. As a result, leaders maintain an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and take targeted action.
10. Governors provide oversight through regular meetings and review safeguarding, risk and school development information. They scrutinise safeguarding reports, the risk register and leaders' self-evaluation and provide appropriate challenge. As a result, they maintain suitable oversight and ensure that the Standards are met.
11. In the early years, leaders manage the setting effectively through regular staff appraisal meetings, targeted professional development and systematic assessment processes, enabling them to monitor children's progress closely and respond promptly to individual needs.
12. Leaders take a systematic and evidence-informed approach to self-evaluation. They draw on lesson visits and scrutiny of pupils' work, assessment analysis, wellbeing surveys and stakeholder feedback to identify priorities. They review this information in regular leadership meetings and report it to governors, enabling suitable challenge and oversight. They have implemented targeted improvements, including revisions to the prep school English curriculum, and strengthened departmental accountability following examination analysis. These actions contribute to a curriculum that increasingly reflects pupils' needs and supports progress over time.
13. Leaders ensure that staff listen and respond to pupil, parent and staff feedback. They review this information alongside other monitoring evidence and adapt provision where appropriate, including refinements to communication and transition arrangements. As a result, they maintain an accurate understanding of the school community and respond to emerging needs.
14. Leaders fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010 through a regularly reviewed accessibility plan. They monitor its implementation through site review, individual planning and ongoing evaluation of access arrangements. They make reasonable adjustments where required so that pupils, including those with disabilities and other protected characteristics, access the curriculum and wider school life. They demonstrate a secure understanding of their responsibilities for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) and ensure that provision and funding support identified needs, and are appropriately reviewed.
15. Leaders maintain accurate admission and attendance registers in line with statutory requirements. They analyse attendance regularly, identify patterns and take appropriate action where concerns arise. They ensure that the local authority is notified when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition points. These arrangements support effective oversight of attendance and contribute to pupils' safety and wellbeing.
16. Leaders make policies, reports and key information available through the school website and regular communication. They implement a suitable complaints procedure and ensure that staff record, investigate and resolve concerns appropriately. They review complaints information to identify patterns and inform improvements, supporting transparency and accountability.

17. Leaders identify, assess and manage risk through a systematic approach to identified risks of the school premises, pupil activities and individual pupils. They review these through routine checks and external input where appropriate. They monitor actions and adapt provision to mitigate risk. As a result, they manage risk effectively.
18. Leaders ensure that staff implement appropriate procedures for premises, health and safety and fire safety. They oversee routine maintenance, site checks and compliance processes so that the environment supports learning and wellbeing across all phases of the school.

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

19. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders and staff design a broad and carefully sequenced curriculum that enables pupils to develop knowledge, skills and understanding progressively as they move through the school from early years to the sixth form. They evaluate its implementation through lesson visits, scrutiny of pupils' work and analysis of assessment information. They identify areas for development and implement targeted adjustments, including the introduction of a rich-text approach in English and strengthened curriculum planning following examination analysis. These actions ensure that the curriculum increasingly reflects pupils' needs and supports sustained progress over time, including in the sixth form, where pupils follow a suitable range of academic subjects, preparing them appropriately for their future pathways.
21. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and plan lessons effectively, taking account of prior learning and assessment information. They explain new concepts clearly so that pupils understand and engage with their learning, and leaders review teaching to ensure this clarity is consistent across subjects. In many lessons, teachers require pupils to recall what they have learned previously and make connections across topics, supporting them to remember and apply this knowledge with increasing confidence. Questioning, discussion, modelling and practical activities are used by teachers to support pupils in applying knowledge and developing understanding.
22. In the early years, staff implement a well-organised and ambitious curriculum that combines adult-led teaching with purposeful play across the seven areas of the early years curriculum. They prioritise communication and language development through structured phonics teaching, modelling and carefully planned activities. Staff use ongoing assessment to identify children's needs and adapt provision accordingly. As a result, children develop confidence, independence and secure foundations for future learning, demonstrating increasing accuracy in early reading and communication from their starting points.
23. In the prep school, teachers provide opportunities for independent work and application, enabling pupils to select appropriate challenge, use resources effectively and explain their reasoning. These approaches support pupils to extend their thinking independently, and pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Many transfer successfully to local grammar schools following the 11+ examinations, reflecting secure development of their knowledge, skills and understanding.
24. In the senior school, teachers support engagement and progress but in a small number of lessons they do not consistently extend pupils with high prior attainment to deepen their understanding or develop their reasoning. As a result, some pupils with higher prior attainment do not achieve the level of progress which they are capable of. Despite this, pupils' attainment in public examinations is in line with national expectations, and leaders use detailed analysis of outcomes to inform curriculum development and targeted intervention. In the sixth form, pupils follow a suitable range of courses and teaching is increasingly personalised, supporting the development of higher-order thinking. Most pupils progress to their first-choice destinations, including universities and apprenticeships.
25. Teachers integrate provision for pupils who have SEND effectively within classroom practice using adapted resources, visual prompts and graduated guidance to support access to learning. This provision is informed by a clear, whole-school approach, including the use of individual learning plans, a dual-register system and regular review through an assess-plan-do-review cycle, ensuring

that emerging needs are identified and addressed promptly. Leaders and staff review progress regularly and adapt provision where necessary. Specialist interventions, such as structured literacy programmes and the deployment of learning support mentors, are carefully monitored for impact. Pupils participate readily in lessons and make good, and sometimes above expected progress in line with their needs.

26. Teachers support pupils who speak EAL through clear modelling of language, visual resources and targeted strategies, informed by early identification on entry, including baseline assessment and information gathered from previous settings and families. They provide planned opportunities for speaking and listening, and check pupils' understanding routinely, adapting support within lessons so that pupils are able to make the progress they are capable of.
27. Teachers use assessment effectively to monitor pupils' progress and inform teaching. They carry out starting-point assessments, regular testing and ongoing checks within lessons. They provide feedback that pupils understand and apply, resulting in improved quality and accuracy of work over time. Pupils explain clearly how feedback supports improvement and demonstrate this in subsequent work. Where this practice is most effective, pupils refine their work and deepen their understanding.
28. Teachers prioritise the development of reading, writing and mathematics across the curriculum, particularly in the early years and prep school. Staff implement phonics programmes consistently, using regular assessment and targeted support to develop secure decoding and reading fluency. Reading is well embedded across the school. In the prep school, pupils read regularly through approaches such as time set aside daily for everyone to read in class and individual reading with teachers, using texts matched to their ability. In the senior school, pupils apply reading skills across subjects, using increasingly complex and subject-specific texts to support their understanding and develop technical vocabulary. As a result, pupils read confidently and make secure progress.
29. Leaders and staff provide a broad and accessible range of extra-curricular opportunities that extend pupils' learning beyond the classroom. These include sport, music, drama, trips and a developing 'super-curriculum' linked to the 'Highclare Diploma'. This programme, currently in its early stages, enables pupils to develop wider skills such as independence, leadership and personal responsibility through activities including volunteering, physical challenges and practical tasks. Initiatives such as the 'Star Award', where pupils complete a range of tasks linked to participation, responsibility and personal development against clear success criteria, provide opportunities for pupils to extend their learning independently. Through these experiences, pupils develop confidence, teamwork and wider interests, supporting their educational development beyond the classroom

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

**30. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

31. Leaders and staff implement effective pastoral systems to support pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing across all phases of the school. Staff operate a well-structured personal tutor system through which pupils receive consistent guidance and support. Teachers and tutors know pupils well, monitor their wellbeing and provide regular opportunities for discussion. Leaders review pastoral information and meet with staff to consider emerging concerns. This ensures that pupils receive timely support and remain engaged in school life.
32. Teachers apply behaviour expectations consistently in lessons and around the school. They reinforce clear routines so that pupils understand what is expected of them. Pupils behave well, co-operate with others and show respect for staff and their peers. Records indicate occasional behavioural incidents in older year groups. Where such issues arise, staff address concerns quickly and reinforce expectations so that positive behaviour is maintained. Incidents of bullying are addressed promptly and effectively, with clear systems for reporting and monitoring, so that pupils are supported. Pupils demonstrate an understanding of expectations and, in most cases, regulate their behaviour effectively.
33. Teachers implement a suitable programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE). They plan lessons that include relationships, consent, mental health, online safety, responsibility and understanding difference. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to discuss these topics and reflect on their experiences, enabling them to consider different perspectives and develop their understanding. Pupils demonstrate an understanding of how to manage relationships, maintain their wellbeing and make informed decisions. Teachers assess pupils' knowledge and understanding in these areas to inform future planning and teaching, ensuring that provision is responsive to pupils' needs.
34. Teachers and leaders promote respect for different backgrounds, beliefs and individual differences through curriculum content, assemblies and pastoral provision. They introduce these themes across subjects and reinforce them through discussion and wider school activities such as 'mother tongue' assemblies led by pupils and families, which celebrate and develop understanding of different languages and cultural backgrounds within the school community, and whole-school initiatives including 'pupil of the week', 'legend of the week' and 'acts of kindness' awards, which recognise and promote respect and inclusion. As a result, pupils demonstrate respect for others and show an understanding of viewpoints beyond their own experience.
35. Staff promote pupils' physical health through a planned programme of physical education, sport and recreational activities. They provide regular opportunities for pupils to be physically active and develop co-ordination, control and physical competence over time. Pupils engage positively in lessons, for example in rounders and football lessons where individual skills are developed through coaching and applied in small-sided games, and pupils demonstrate enthusiasm and a determination to improve. This is further developed through a range of extra-curricular sporting opportunities which are well attended and support further participation in physical activity. As a result, pupils demonstrate an understanding of how to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle and how this relates to the importance of regular exercise and a balanced diet. Leaders monitor participation and review provision to ensure that activities meet pupils' needs across the school from early years to sixth form.

36. In the early years, staff plan and implement activities and routines that promote children's personal, emotional and physical development. They provide opportunities for children to develop fine and gross motor skills through activities both indoors and outdoors, including climbing, balancing and the use of ride-on equipment. Staff use these experiences to develop children's co-ordination, balance and control. Children sustain engagement, develop increasing independence and manage their own needs effectively, becoming confident learners who are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
37. Leaders ensure that staff implement appropriate health and safety procedures across the school, including fire safety and risk assessment. They oversee routine checks, supervision arrangements and medical provision so that pupil safety is considered throughout the school day. Staff respond to medical needs through clear first aid procedures and accurate record-keeping.
38. Leaders monitor attendance through regular analysis and oversight. Those with responsibility for attendance review attendance information alongside safeguarding and pastoral data to identify patterns, including persistent absence. They take appropriate action where concerns arise and work with parents and external agencies where necessary to support pupils so that attendance does not become a barrier to learning. Leaders notify the local authority when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition points.

### **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. Leaders and staff promote pupils' social development through the curriculum, pastoral provision and opportunities to take responsibility within the school community. Teachers plan curriculum activities that enable pupils to work collaboratively, listen to others and contribute to group activities. Pupils express their views confidently and engage positively with their peers, developing effective social skills. In the early years, staff support children to develop social skills by providing opportunities to share, take turns and communicate with others. Children build positive relationships, co-operate with their peers and engage confidently in group activities.
41. Leaders and staff provide opportunities for pupils to take on positions of responsibility, including roles such as school council representatives, prefects, form captains and ambassadors. They oversee these roles and evaluate the impact of pupils' contributions through regular review. Pupils take part in elections and contribute to discussions about aspects of school development, for example through the school council, where pupils select charities to support and have also contributed to changes such as the redevelopment of lunchtime menus. They represent the views of others and suggest improvements, developing an understanding of leadership, responsibility and representation in practice.
42. Teachers promote British values through the curriculum, including democracy, respect and the rule of law. They provide opportunities for pupils to consider different viewpoints and understand how these values apply in society. Pupils engage in discussion, consider a range of perspectives and develop informed views about life in modern British society. They develop a clear understanding of right and wrong through the consistent application of the school's code of conduct alongside opportunities to explore moral and ethical issues within the curriculum, such as discussions around personal safety, relationships and social responsibility. Staff address inappropriate behaviour promptly, including any discriminatory language, reinforcing expectations and supporting pupils to reflect on the impact and consequences of their actions. As a result, pupils demonstrate an understanding of fairness, respect and accountability in their day-to-day interactions.
43. Teachers and leaders promote pupils' understanding of diversity through curriculum content and wider school experiences including 'mother tongue' assemblies where pupils and their families share aspects of their home languages and cultural traditions. They introduce themes such as identity, culture and belief across subjects and reinforce these through assemblies and themed activities. These experiences help pupils to understand and value diversity within their community, promoting mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. Pupils consider different perspectives and demonstrate respect for others, showing an understanding of experiences beyond their own and contributing to a positive and inclusive school community. As a result, pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of life in modern British society and demonstrate respect for different perspectives.
44. Teachers develop pupils' understanding of economic wellbeing through planned curriculum experiences and practical application. In the early years and prep school, staff teach pupils about money through practical activities, including recognising coins and making choices. As pupils move through the school, teachers provide opportunities to take part in enterprise activities that require planning, budgeting and evaluation. Through these experiences, pupils develop an understanding of

financial decision-making, including managing resources, evaluating outcomes and making informed choices.

45. Leaders plan and oversee a progressive careers programme which begins in the prep school and continues through to the sixth form, including through the PSHE programme and subject teaching. They monitor participation and review provision to ensure that guidance meets pupils' needs, evaluating the programme regularly to ensure it provides a broad and balanced range of experiences. Staff enable pupils to explore their interests and strengths, including profiling in Year 10 leading to personalised guidance. Staff also enable pupils to use online platforms, attend careers events and engage with external speakers about future choices. Teachers and leaders provide guidance to older pupils on subject choices and next steps, including higher education and alternative pathways, with all pupils in Year 11 and 12 receiving individual guidance to support option choices. As a result, pupils make informed decisions about their future and understand the range of options available to them.
46. Leaders and staff provide opportunities for pupils to contribute to the wider community through charitable and outreach activities. These include sustained links with a village in Thailand, where pupils visit, engage with local communities and lead fundraising to support improvements in sanitation, as well as partnerships with organisations such as a local hospice and a support dog charity. Pupils participate in fundraising initiatives and community-linked events, including charitable work associated with school trips and engagement with local and national organisations. They contribute to ongoing community partnerships, for example through regular visits and activities with a local residential home, including concerts and social events led by sixth-form pupils. Leaders monitor participation to ensure that these opportunities are accessible to all pupils. As a result, pupils develop an understanding of social responsibility and recognise the impact of their actions on others.

### **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 implement effective safeguarding arrangements across the school in line with current statutory guidance. They promote a culture in which staff remain vigilant and respond appropriately to risk. Staff record concerns using an electronic system and leaders review these records systematically. They analyse patterns, including those linked to vulnerability and online activity, and take timely and proportionate action. This ensures that they identify concerns promptly, assess them appropriately and manage them in a co-ordinated manner. This contributes to an effective safeguarding culture across the school.
49. Those with designated safeguarding responsibilities meet regularly to review concerns, monitor actions and evaluate outcomes. They maintain detailed records of concerns, referrals and follow-up actions. Where necessary, they liaise with external agencies, including the local authority and other safeguarding partners, to secure appropriate support for pupils. They make referrals when thresholds are met and seek advice when required. This co-ordinated approach enables them to evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken and secure appropriate support promptly.
50. Leaders ensure that staff receive safeguarding training, and they review training records and practice to confirm that staff apply this training effectively. They monitor training completion and provide ongoing briefings so that staff remain informed about current guidance and emerging risks. Staff understand how to identify concerns and follow reporting procedures, and leaders review practice to ensure that staff apply procedures consistently. As a result, staff act on concerns promptly and in line with school procedures.
51. Leaders implement safer recruitment procedures in line with statutory requirements. They ensure that appropriate pre-employment checks are completed before adults begin work with pupils and record these accurately on the single central record (SCR). Governors review the SCR regularly to provide effective oversight of recruitment practice.
52. Leaders oversee filtering and monitoring systems to support online safety. They review alerts and respond appropriately when concerns arise. Staff reinforce this through the curriculum and pastoral provision, teaching pupils how to keep themselves safe when using technology. Leaders maintain a mobile-free environment, which reduces the risk of misuse of devices and supports effective supervision.
53. Pupils have clear routes to raise concerns and staff respond promptly. Leaders monitor how staff record and follow up concerns so that safeguarding remains embedded in daily practice. As a result, pupils are confident to report concerns and receive appropriate help when needed.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Highclare School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	330/6060
<b>Registered charity number</b>	528940
<b>Address</b>	Highclare School 10 Sutton Road Erdington Birmingham B23 6QL
<b>Phone number</b>	0121 373 7400
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@highclareschool.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.highclareschool.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Highclare School
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Louise Flowith
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Francine Smith
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	464
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	18 to 20 April 2023

## Information about the school

55. Highclare School is an independent co-educational day school for children in the early years and pupils up to the sixth form. Founded in 1932, it is a registered charity overseen by a board of governors. The school operates across four sites in Erdington and Sutton Coldfield. It comprises: a senior school and sixth form, for pupils aged 11 to 18; and two preparatory schools, St Paul's and Woodfield, for children aged 2 to 11. There are early years settings in both preparatory schools. The current headteacher joined the school in January 2024.
56. There are 93 children in the early years, comprising three classes at St Paul's and three classes at Woodfield.
57. The school has identified 51 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities.
58. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
59. The school has identified English as an additional language for 51 pupils.
60. The school states its aims are to encourage independent learning and individual excellence within a secure and happy setting. It seeks to motivate pupils to achieve their full potential and to develop self-respect and self-discipline, alongside tolerance and respect for others and the environment.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

21 to 23 April 2026

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

62. 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.

63. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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