

# School inspection report

21 to 23 October 2025

## **St Dominic's Priory School**

37 Station Road

Stone

Staffordshire

ST15 8ER

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

<b>SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS .....	5
<b>SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....</b>	<b>6</b>
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE .....	7
<b>SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION .....	9
<b>SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING.....</b>	<b>10</b>
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING .....	11
<b>SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....</b>	<b>12</b>
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY .....	13
<b>SAFEGUARDING .....</b>	<b>14</b>
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING .....	14
<b>SCHOOL DETAILS .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>INSPECTION DETAILS .....</b>	<b>17</b>

## Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders encourage staff and pupils to reflect on their achievements, share their ideas and strive for continuous improvement. The school's website includes most of the required information. However, at the start of the inspection, not all previous inspection reports since 2015 were available on the school's website. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.
2. Governors engage proactively with leaders and demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's statutory responsibilities. They scrutinise leaders' reports on safeguarding, the quality of the curriculum, pupils' performance and site safety. Governors follow up on the findings from external audits and check the impact of leaders' actions. They provide both challenge and support to leaders.
3. Senior leaders and subject leaders demonstrate professional knowledge and a secure understanding of effective curriculum design and the assessment of pupils' progress. Leaders make sure that teachers understand their high expectations. Teachers respond through consistently effective teaching, well-structured schemes of work and systematic feedback practices that help pupils to learn more. The consistent quality of teaching across subjects enables pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to make good progress. Teachers use different resources and personalised approaches to adapt their teaching and make sure that no pupil is left behind.
4. The extensive and varied programme of enrichment activities contributes well to pupils' personal development. Pupils' enthusiasm is evident. They are engaged and focused during activities. Pupils develop skills in teamwork. They are resilient and this supports their physical wellbeing.
5. The school's curriculum and pastoral systems promote pupils' self-awareness and self-belief. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning and take ownership of their progress. They understand what they do well and what they could do better. The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and the personal development programmes are thoughtfully structured to support pupils' emotional and social growth. PSHE lessons teach pupils about mental health, healthy lifestyles and relationships in age-appropriate ways.
6. Pupils benefit from positive relationships with staff that are built on trust, care and mutual respect. Teachers model compassion and empathy, promoting a culture where kindness and consideration for others are the expected norms. The school's nurturing environment enables pupils to express themselves confidently, both during lessons and in wider school activities. Most pupils are kind and caring towards each other. However, behaviour records and discussions with pupils and staff show that relationships between some pupils in the senior school are not as positive as they could be.
7. Staff typically follow the school's supervision procedures. This supports pupils' safety both on site and during external activities. Occasionally, staff lack the knowledge and confidence to follow the procedures as set out in the school's supervision, first aid and administration of medicines policies.
8. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to apply themselves and to approach challenges confidently. They also encourage pupils to help others and contribute positively to the wider community.
9. Leaders ensure that a culture of vigilance exists, which supports pupils' safety. All adults are thoroughly checked prior to working at the school. The school's safeguarding team ensures that pupils' safety and wellbeing are prioritised.

10. Staff are well trained, confident and proactive in identifying and reporting safeguarding concerns about pupils. Staff are guided and supported by approachable and knowledgeable safeguarding leaders. Systems for recording, monitoring and responding to safeguarding concerns are robust and consistently applied. Leaders follow concerns up rigorously. Outside agencies are used well to help keep pupils safe.

## 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:

- equip pupils in senior school with the social skills and understanding to develop and maintain positive relationships with each other that support their emotional wellbeing
- ensure that staff have the knowledge and confidence to consistently implement the procedures set out in the supervision, first aid and administration of medicines policies
- ensure that all previous inspection reports are always available on the school's website.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders are committed to promoting the wellbeing of staff and pupils. The support and guidance staff receive from leaders helps them to carry out their roles and responsibilities well. Leaders' visibility around the school, structured form periods and consistent routines foster a calm, respectful environment that supports pupils' sense of belonging. Senior leaders empower staff in the early years to make child-centred decisions, resulting in consistently high-quality teaching and learning experiences for children.
12. The school's ethos puts pupils at the heart of decisions made. Leaders ensure that staff and pupils know what is expected of them. As a result, the sense of teamwork and community cohesion permeates through the school. Leaders demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding to promote pupils' wellbeing. They take a proactive approach to safeguarding and behaviour management. Leaders work closely with outside agencies to provide effective support for vulnerable pupils.
13. The school's approach to risk assessment is systematic and well documented, supported by regular external audits and detailed internal monitoring. Health and safety risks are identified, recorded and acted upon promptly. Risk assessment practice, particularly in relation to site safety and pupils' extra-curricular activities, is embedded. This includes the risk assessments for pupils who have SEND during trips and work placements. The detailed and responsive assessments support pupils' access and safety without limiting their opportunities to fully take part.
14. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The accessibility plan promotes equality and inclusion. Senior leaders, in collaboration with learning support and facilities management staff, take the necessary actions to make sure that pupils can access all aspects of school life. Adjustments are made to teaching and physical spaces, including the installation of a lift in the main school building. The school has a robust system for tracking and accounting for the provision of pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Leaders complete annual reviews of pupils' progress for their parents and report to local authorities on how funding is used, as required.
15. Leaders ensure that most of the required information is provided to parents, including the school's policies, aims and ethos. The school's website has a hyperlink to the previous inspection report. However, the requirement to make all inspection reports since 2014 available to parents and parents of prospective pupils was not in place at the start of the inspection. This had to be rectified during the inspection. The complaints policy is available to parents and leaders follow the procedures set out in the policy when responding to parental complaints. Any concerns are resolved quickly, and often informally. Complaints are managed within the stated time scales.
16. Leaders consult regularly with staff, pupils, parents and carers to review and refine the school's practice. Pupils and staff work hard and thrive. Leaders frequently check the quality of teaching and hold teachers to account for pupils' outcomes. Leaders provide teachers with regular training and the latest educational research. Opportunities for the professional development of staff contribute well to the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.
17. Leaders and governors closely monitor all aspects of the school's work and plan future developments. Governors are committed to their roles and regularly visit the school. They know the

school well. They have an accurate understanding of its effective practice and the areas for improvement. Governors ensure that school life centres on pupils' specific needs so that the school remains inclusive and makes sure that every pupil count.

18. Governors ensure that leaders at all levels fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Governors are well informed about the school's work through the high-quality reports they receive from senior leaders and subject leaders. Governors review pupils' progress information and hold leaders to account for pupils' achievements.

### **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. The school's curriculum includes a wide range of subjects designed to develop pupils' academic, vocational and life skills. Staff make sure that pupils' individual skills and talents are nurtured and that teaching is personalised to meet pupils' needs. Leaders and staff encourage pupils' independence, resilience and determination to be successful. Subject leaders share senior leaders' enthusiasm for effective teaching and learning. They work well as a team to evaluate and refine the curriculum and ensure that it enables pupils' learning.
21. In the early years, children are taught a broad, language-rich curriculum that covers all required areas of learning. They are encouraged to make meaningful links with their learning. Children's educational experience is enhanced with off-site visits to Cannock Chase, local farms, theatres and the nearby town of Stone. Teachers plan and teach a range of engaging activities to develop children's phonic knowledge, early number sense and handwriting fluency. Children develop secure foundational skills for future learning. Children make good progress and demonstrate increasing independence and confidence. Leaders and staff regularly engage with parents to share their child's achievements and guide parents in how to support their child's learning at home.
22. Teachers plan lessons well. Learning is organised so that pupils build on their prior knowledge and skills over time. The development of pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills is embedded throughout the prep school curriculum. Leaders and teachers make sure that tasks are interesting and relevant. Teachers plan the teaching of reading skills into pupils' learning across the curriculum. Pupils read widely and talk enthusiastically about the books they read for pleasure. Pupils are eager to learn and study subjects in depth. Teachers use stimulating visual resources and make cross-curricular links to encourage pupils' observation skills, communication skills and critical thinking across different subjects. Pupils learn to connect and apply their learning in new contexts.
23. Pupils attain positive results in English and mathematics GCSE examinations that are typically above national averages. Pupils achieve well in other areas of the curriculum, such as sport, dance, art and the performing arts. Leaders are swift to identify any pupils who have SEND. Leaders put the right support in place to address pupils' individual needs. This includes the use of specialised resources such as worksheets on coloured paper to support pupils with dyslexia and tilted tables for pupils with physical disabilities. Pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
24. The small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) learn successfully because of individualised support and resources that enable them to access the curriculum and develop their fluency in speaking, reading and writing.
25. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together, providing effective support to pupils. They use targeted questioning to check pupils' understanding and encourage pupils to extend their learning. They check on pupils' progress and adapt their teaching to help those falling behind and to challenge pupils with higher prior attainment. Teachers know pupils well. They use this knowledge to identify and set individualised targets that help each pupil to understand their next steps and make good progress in their learning.
26. The mathematics curriculum is well organised and taught effectively throughout the school. Teachers provide pupils with regular opportunities to undertake problem-solving activities that

challenge and deepen their thinking. During science lessons, teachers encourage pupils to research, experiment and complete increasingly complex tasks. Through the design and technology (DT) and art curriculums, pupils are taught to use drawing techniques effectively. They learn to produce isometric images of cubes, cylinders and ellipses with accurate use of shading, line and tone.

27. The school's assessment systems, such as half-termly data reviews and subject moderations, are well structured and well understood by staff. Leaders use assessment information effectively to identify progress trends and plan work that is well matched to pupils' needs. Teachers encourage pupils to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. As a result, pupils know what they do well and what they need to do to improve their work.
28. The school's extra-curricular programme includes rich and varied activities. These provide pupils with opportunities to develop their creativity, resilience, teamwork, intellectual curiosity and social responsibility. Activities such as robotics, performing arts and sports fixtures, alongside initiatives such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE), support pupils to develop their talents and interests.

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

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

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

30. The school's well-organised PSHE curriculum draws effectively from both national and Catholic Association resources. It includes the required curriculum for relationships and sex education (RSE), which covers themes such as consent and healthy, safe relationships. Activities in PSHE lessons, expressive arts and leadership programmes cultivate pupils' confidence, independence and emotional resilience. Teachers' constructive feedback and encouragement contribute positively to pupils' self-esteem, helping pupils to understand the world around them and to view challenges as opportunities to learn more.
31. The learning environment in the early years is interesting and engaging. Teachers use equipment and resources thoughtfully to inspire children to learn. Adults interact positively with children and use many opportunities to extend children's language and communication skills. Consequently, children articulate their ideas and explain their choices about what they want to learn and why. The well-established routines and clear expectations in the early years create a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Children are secure, happy and confident as they engage with others. The outdoor environment is used as an integral extension of indoor provision. Children are given daily opportunities to engage in physical activities that build their co-ordination, balance and spatial awareness.
32. Staff typically understand and enact the school's supervision, first aid and administration of medicines policies. However, on one occasion during the inspection, leaders did not ensure that children eating a snack were always supervised by staff with paediatric first aid training. Leaders rectified this during the inspection by timetabling children's snack time to take place at an earlier time to ensure that children are supervised by appropriately trained staff, as specified in the school's policies.
33. Pupils' behaviour is good. Across the prep school, pupils are taught to listen carefully to staff and follow instructions promptly. Pupils understand the school's routines that promote mutual respect and support their purposeful engagement in learning. Well-placed staff provide effective supervision during lessons and in communal areas. This ensures pupils' individual needs are met and contributes to the school's inclusive and well-managed learning environment. Pupils understand the reward systems and are keen to be recognised for their efforts and for demonstrating positive behaviour. Pupils are motivated to behave well and they take pride in their achievements.
34. Staff are attuned to pupils' emotional wellbeing and intervene when support is needed. Regular assemblies and discussions encourage reflection, empathy and responsibility. This helps pupils to make positive choices and manage stress effectively. Through reflection activities during form time, senior school pupils connect their learning to real-life contexts. This includes through topics such as consent, marriage and inappropriate sexual behaviour. Pupils learn the importance of having respect for all people. Pupils are clear that prejudice and discrimination of any kind should not be tolerated.
35. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and are greatly valued by pupils, who describe the school as a family. Pupils are considerate of the views of others and listen with interest to different opinions. This includes during open conversations about their beliefs, which reflect the school's ethos of 'Living and learning with Christ as our guide', and frequent discussions of values such as human dignity, care and peace. Pupils of all faiths regularly attend mass at St Dominic's

Catholic Church and lead prayers in form time and assemblies. These opportunities for prayer, reflection and service enable pupils' spiritual development and foster a sense of community and shared purpose. The use of spiritual reflection spaces, such as the prayer garden, nurture pupils' sense of belonging and wellbeing.

36. The physical education (PE) curriculum is well structured. Lessons are inclusive and well organised, ensuring that pupils benefit from improving their physical health and emotional wellbeing, alongside participating safely and confidently. The school provides for pupils' physical wellbeing through a range of sports clubs as well as in dance and drama lessons. Pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and its effect on their bodies.
37. Throughout the prep and senior schools, the positive behaviour culture and well-taught moral education develop pupils' responsibility, empathy and respect for others. The school tracks pupils' engagement and attitudes to learning to make sure that pupils benefit from teaching and develop helpful study skills. Leaders keep detailed records of behaviour incidents. They regularly analyse this information to identify any patterns and trends in pupils' behaviour and take action to address these. Bullying rarely occurs and, when it does, it is dealt with appropriately. In the senior school, a small number of pupils are not sufficiently supported to develop and use the necessary skills to maintain positive friendships with each other. Some pupils fall out and cause upset to others.
38. Leaders ensure that health and safety are well managed through rigorous procedures and compliance checks. The premises are well maintained and secure, with regular servicing of fire alarms, emergency lighting and safety equipment. Staff training and staff supervision protocols support pupils' safe conduct in classrooms, sports areas and during trips. Medical and dietary risks are explicitly recorded in trip documentation, ensuring that pupils with specific needs are supported when off site. The well-equipped first aid room, trained staff and clear reporting procedures ensure that most pupils receive prompt and appropriate medical care. Pupils' specific medical needs are routinely recorded and communicated to relevant staff, which supports inclusion and pupils' safety. However, not all staff receive sufficient training and guidance to be confident and consistent in applying the school's first aid and allergy-response procedures.
39. Senior leaders ensure that admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained, as required. Attendance is closely monitored. Pupils understand the link between regular attendance and achieving their ambitions. The school informs the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.

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

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

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

41. Children in the early years receive effective support from staff to develop their social and emotional skills. Children are taught how to play happily together, share and take turns. They are co-operative learners and are well prepared to move on to Year 1. Older pupils are encouraged to explore moral, social and cultural themes that deepen their understanding of the wider world. History, English and religious education (RE) lessons explicitly teach pupils about personal identity, diversity and ethical topics. Residential trips abroad, such as to Normandy, and fieldwork visits extend pupils' learning beyond the classroom.
42. The principles of democracy, fairness and justice are embedded through the curriculum. Assemblies, debates and PSHE lessons encourage pupils to discuss topical issues and understand democratic processes. The school council elections mirror democratic practice, enabling pupils to experience representation and decision-making. The school promotes British values and respect for diversity. Assemblies and class debates explore topics such as voting age and democracy, with mock elections that reinforce pupils' understanding of civic participation. Catholic social teaching, PSHE and assemblies emphasise respect, tolerance and service to others. This prepares pupils to be active and responsible citizens in modern British society. Pupils engage in charitable work, eco-initiatives and community partnerships, through which they develop empathy and an understanding of civic responsibility.
43. Pupils from Year 7 onwards access the school's careers programme. Pupils receive structured careers guidance and benefit from engagement with external professionals such as guest speakers from the North Staffordshire Careers Association and the Royal Air Force. Older pupils take part in work experience placements that provide authentic opportunities to develop their employability, confidence and communication skills. Pupils who have SEND are supported to access meaningful placements that reflect their interests and talents. Many pupils articulate clear aspirations for post-16 pathways and demonstrate maturity and ambition in planning their next steps.
44. From the start in the early years through to the end of the senior school, pupils are taught economic education through 'form markets'. This is the school's chosen enterprise initiative that involves pupils in profit-making activities, money handling and charitable giving, such as fundraising for CAFOD (the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development) and the 'live simply' challenge. These provide pupils with real-life experiences that develop their financial literacy, foster social responsibility and deepen their understanding of key economic concepts. Different year groups develop age-appropriate financial literacy through appropriate activities. For example, pupils in Year 4 plan a party within a specific budget. Older pupils explore gambling risks and how to make safe financial choices.
45. Pupils understand right from wrong through PSHE lessons and their relationships with other pupils both within form groups and across year groups. Pupils know the school rules and understand that they can earn house points for positive contributions as part of the school's tiered rewards system. A school council structure, led by prefects, empowers pupils to share their views and influence school decisions.
46. Pupils' teamwork and leadership skills are developed through the house system and the school council. Leadership roles, such as prefects, subject ambassadors, lunch monitors and tidy-peg

monitors in the early years, allow pupils of all ages to act as role models and play their part in school life. These opportunities support relationships across year groups and foster a shared sense of belonging and community identity. Pupils elect their school council representatives and apply for prefect positions. Prefects act as role models for younger pupils and are supportive with their transition into the senior school. Pupils take pride in representing the school and show a secure sense of personal responsibility.

47. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to discuss and debate world events during form time. Pupils are encouraged to share their views and opinions. Pupils explain rights and responsibilities that promote inclusion for all and articulate the benefits of living in a diverse community. They learn about other religions and cultures. Pupils demonstrate sensitivity and tolerance towards people from different backgrounds.

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

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

## Safeguarding

49. Safeguarding pupils is central to the school's culture, ensuring staff remain vigilant and pupils are protected from harm.
50. The school's recruitment policy sets out the required checks and procedures that are carried out. Leaders and staff responsible for recruitment make sure these checks and the supporting evidence are in place prior to staff commencing work at the school. These are recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR).
51. The school's safeguarding policy reflects the latest requirements concerning child protection. Staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training and briefings. This includes training in the risks of radicalisation and extremism, as well as about online safety. As a result, staff and governors know how to recognise signs of abuse and neglect. Staff are fully trained in how to report any concerns they may have about a pupil's welfare. Training is provided regularly to ensure that staff are kept up to date with current child protection legislation.
52. Leaders take appropriate action in relation to concerns about pupils' safety and welfare. They consider each individual pupil's physical and psychological needs and wishes, including those pupils who have SEND. This information is used to agree appropriate actions, including the drawing up and implementation of individual support plans, when required. Leaders work with external agencies to ensure vulnerable pupils receive the help they need quickly. Appropriate filtering and monitoring arrangements are in place to support pupils' safety when using the internet. Pupils are encouraged to share any concerns they have with staff.
53. Governors take their role to oversee safeguarding seriously. They meet frequently with the safeguarding team. Governors are kept informed of current concerns and they check that leaders have responded to these appropriately. Governors ensure that recruitment checks have been completed in line with the school's policy and procedures.
54. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in various situations, including when using the internet. Pupils take part in discussions on contextual risks, such as online safety, county lines and discrimination. These opportunities equip pupils with the knowledge to navigate different situations safely.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	St Dominic's Priory School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	860/6011
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1141147
<b>Address</b>	St Dominic's Priory School 37 Station Road Stone Staffordshire ST15 8ER
<b>Phone number</b>	01785 814181
<b>Email address</b>	info@stdominicspriory.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.stdominicspriory.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	St Dominic's Priory School (Stone)
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Karen Champ
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Rebecca Harrison
<b>Age range</b>	3 to 16
<b>Number of pupils</b>	184
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	29 November to 1 December 2022

## Information about the school

56. St Dominic's Priory School is a co-educational Catholic day school located in Stone, Staffordshire. The school was founded by The English Dominican Sisters in 1934. A board of governors governs the school.
57. There are a small number of children in pre-school and eight children in Reception. At the time of the inspection, it was identified that the school was operating outside its youngest registered age.
58. The school has identified 61 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are 16 pupils in the school who have an education, health and care plan.
59. The school has identified 11 pupils who speak English as an additional language.
60. The school states its aims are to instil in its pupils a love of learning in a friendly and happy environment and a sense of community spirit and belonging. It seeks to nurture individuality, enable pupils to succeed academically, contribute positively to society and develop into confident, nurturing and caring young people who are ready to go out into the world and make a difference.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

21 to 23 October 2025

61. A team of four 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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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)