ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

2 to 4 December 2025

Blundell's School

Blundell's Road

Tiverton

Devon

EX16 4DN

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 have a clear vision for school development based on close monitoring and thorough self-evaluation. Governors maintain efficient oversight of the school, enabling them to ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Leaders adopt a strategic approach to the management of risk and take effective and appropriate action to mitigate the risks identified.

2. Parents receive reports that provide them with information about their child's attainment, progress and attitudes to learning. However, written comments in parental reports do not always provide clear information on what pupils need to do in order to improve.

3. The broad curriculum is designed to meet the needs and aptitudes of pupils. Teachers know their pupils well, have good subject knowledge and use a range of activities, resources and feedback to help pupils to learn effectively. Leaders of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provide clear information to teachers, which helps them to promote pupils' learning effectively. In the sixth form, pupils' attainment and progress has improved in recent years as a result of consistently implemented teaching strategies.

4. The curriculum is complemented by a well-resourced co-curricular programme which benefits pupils of all ages and abilities, including pupils in the sixth form. The co-curricular programme is wide-ranging and well designed to support pupils' different skills, interests and personal development. It allows pupils to explore and develop their interests in substantial breadth and depth. Pupils take part enthusiastically and develop their self-confidence, leadership skills and understanding of how to contribute positively to the lives of others very well. Leaders closely monitor pupils' participation in the many activities available to make sure that everyone benefits. The programme is regularly reviewed and adapted to meet pupils' changing interests. This is a significant strength of the school.

5. The school enables pupils to develop their spiritual and moral understanding, self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence effectively. Pastoral arrangements ensure that pupils are well cared for. As a result, pupils develop their confidence in expressing themselves. Pupils have a clear understanding of tolerance and respect for others. Pupils understand the need to follow school rules. Leaders successfully identify and address any patterns of negative behaviour. Consequently, behaviour is good and bullying is rare.

6. Leaders have created a welcoming and supportive boarding environment, which is successful in fostering pupils' personal development. Pupils learn to co-exist effectively and respond to the needs of others. Staff are always available to contact should pupils have any worries or concerns.

7. Leaders have a systematic approach to the management of health and safety, including fire safety protocols. Appropriate first aid is readily available when required.

8. Pupils are well informed and equipped to make financial decisions. Many pupils regularly volunteer in the community. Pupils are well placed to make a positive contribution to society in their future lives.

9. Leaders have developed a comprehensive, impartial and well-structured careers programme for pupils throughout the school. Leaders are highly qualified and use nationally recognised frameworks to design, review and develop the programme. Staff track pupils' engagement in the programme and follow up appropriately. The views of pupils are used to develop the curriculum and respond to

pupils' needs. Leaders ensure that pupils have contact with a range of different employers throughout their education. Leaders ensure that staff are trained to ensure that advice remains consistent and impartial. Subject leaders embed careers into their schemes of work, with a focus on creating a curriculum vitae (CV) in language lessons. Leaders of creative arts subjects invite recent former pupils back to speak with pupils to give them an insight into careers in the arts and to ensure that pupils receive up-to-date advice. Pupils who have SEND are supported appropriately, for example through advice on how to deal with any anxiety related to interviews. Leaders analyse university destinations and adjust support based on pupils' needs, including support with specialist applications. As a result, pupils are well informed, which allows them to make confident choices about their next steps. This is a significant strength of the school.

10. Governors maintain rigorous oversight of safeguarding arrangements at the school. Staff understand and implement the school's procedures for reporting any safeguarding concerns when they arise. Leaders carry out recruitment checks as required by current statutory guidance and record them appropriately. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

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

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that reports to parents consistently contain clear information about what pupils need to do in order to improve their progress and attainment.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders and managers have the required knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively, including actively promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Governors assure themselves that the Standards are met through effective scrutiny and monitoring of the school's practice and procedures. They receive detailed reports, regularly visit the school and review documentation. They provide appropriate challenge and support to leaders.

12. Leaders have an accurate view of the effectiveness of the school and areas for further development. They carefully consider the impact that their actions have on pupils' wellbeing and success. They are methodical and thorough in their self-evaluation, which informs their school development planning. This planning systematically focuses on improving the impact on pupils' wellbeing across all areas of the school's provision. Teaching is informed by the school's established principles, which are well-known by staff and embedded throughout the school. Leaders' oversight of teaching ensures that teachers are highly reflective in their practice and that pupils develop a range of skills that prepare them for life beyond school.

13. The school provides parents with regular reports that contain detailed information about their child's attainment, progress and attitudes to learning. However, these reports do not consistently provide information about what pupils need to do to improve their performance. Required information about the school, including its aims and ethos, is made available to parents and external agencies, largely through the school's informative website.

14. Leaders foster close links with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils. In particular, they maintain an effective working relationship with local safeguarding partners. Leaders also provide information to the local authority about any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.

15. Leaders manage any complaints from parents or boarders appropriately and keep thorough records of these and any actions taken by the school in response. Complaints are dealt with within the timeframes stated in the school's policy.

16. Boarding routines and practice are well communicated. Leaders ensure that new boarding staff undergo an effective induction process, allowing them to quickly understand the school's expectations and procedures. This enables pupils to benefit from staff who are knowledgeable about boarding provision.

17. Leaders maintain a comprehensive and robust approach to risk management. They are aware of different types of physical, welfare and safeguarding risks and respond with urgency and diligence to mitigate potential risks when these are identified. Risk assessments evaluate potential risks thoroughly and detail the appropriate steps taken to reduce or remove these. Leaders systematically monitor risk assessments to check their continued effectiveness.

18. Leaders implement a detailed and appropriate accessibility plan to ensure that all pupils are able to access the curriculum and facilities, such as by developing the physical environment through the provision of additional ramps and lighting. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

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

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. The school offers a broad and carefully structured curriculum that supports good progress. Leaders have successfully embedded a philosophy of education embodied in the school's 'six pillars' so that pupils consistently encounter methodically planned teaching, clear explanations and well-sequenced units of work. Teachers link ideas within and across subjects which help pupils see how different subjects connect. For example, a project on the Berlin Wall links art, history and languages. The curriculum and teaching, supported by the comprehensive and effective use of resources, including digital tools when appropriate, give pupils a foundation for independent study and ensures their thoughtful engagement with challenging material. By the time they leave school, pupils are confident and well prepared for the demands of future study.

21. English lessons skilfully balance reading, writing and discussion. This gives pupils regular chances to practise structured arguments and interpret complex texts. Mathematics lessons follow a clear progression, supported by well-chosen resources, so that pupils' use and understanding of mathematical methodology and terminology develop well. Pupils readily apply their knowledge of number to new contexts such as when using formulae or interpreting graphs in science. Science teaching makes effective use of practical work when applicable, which develops pupils' skills and knowledge. Pupils have the opportunity to study a range of modern foreign languages and practise them through well-structured tasks. Across the range of subjects, pupils develop their literacy and numeracy, secure core knowledge and improve their confidence in providing extended responses and using technical language.

22. Teachers create purposeful lessons that combine clear explanations, questioning and tasks that enable pupils to think for themselves. In many subjects, pupils are shown how to carry out suitably ambitious work and develop understanding through encouraging pupils to reflect and improve. Subjects such as sociology and economics help pupils handle abstract concepts by guiding them through structured activities and well-framed discussions. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to check pupils' understanding and often enable them to correct misconceptions. These approaches help pupils take ownership of their learning, collaborate with their peers and build their confidence with demanding content.

23. The leader of provision for pupils who have SEND provides teachers with clear individual learning plan (ILPs) that outline pupils' needs and helpful strategies to adapt lessons to accommodate them. Many lessons include resources specifically designed to support pupils who have SEND. This ensures that these pupils can demonstrate their understanding and make good progress.

24. Teachers provide pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) with support when required, such as targeted vocabulary sheets, guided reading help and opportunities to build confidence through collaborative work. Older pupils who speak EAL follow demanding pathways, including preparation for examinations in English, which they undertake alongside A levels. Steady guidance helps pupils who speak EAL to develop independence over time and to make good progress.

25. Teachers check pupils' progress through regular tests, tasks in lessons and longer assessments. Departments use standardised assessment data to understand pupils' prior attainment and set suitable expectations, as well as to identify whenever pupils are not making the progress anticipated and provide them with additional support. There is a consistent approach to feedback which helps

pupils identify their areas of success and their next steps. Teachers adjust future lessons when they spot patterns in pupils' work, and pupils respond to comments through redrafting or targeted practice. This helps pupils develop mature study habits and understand what work of high quality looks like. Pupils make good progress from their starting points to GCSE and A level. This progress has markedly improved in the sixth form in recent years as a result of consistently implemented and successful teaching strategies.

26. The co-curricular programme includes academic competitions, creative opportunities and a wide range of sporting involvement. This gives pupils varied ways in which to develop their interests and talents. Teachers track participation to encourage pupils who are less active to join suitable activities. Older pupils lead warm-ups in sports, assist younger pupils or help organise events. The programme enables pupils to pursue and extend their interests in substantial breadth and depth and has a deep impact on pupils' development of leadership skills, self-confidence and sense of responsibility towards others. Leaders listen to pupils' views when planning activities, including their suggestions for new options within the programme. The wide choice of activities broadens pupils' experiences extremely well and enables pupils to develop friendships across year groups.

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

27. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

28. Leaders set a clear, positive tone across the school and maintain a school culture that promotes mutual respect and inclusion. They model such attitudes and reinforce their high expectations for them through assemblies, chapel and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons. Pupils experience warm and professional relationships with staff. Pupils feel comfortable sharing their views because staff treat their questions seriously and guide discussions with care. Boarding routines develop this culture further. Older pupils support younger ones, monitors offer friendly guidance and house staff create welcoming environments. As a result, pupils move around the site confidently and enjoy a clear sense of belonging.

29. Teachers help pupils build confidence by encouraging them to ask questions, try new ideas and reflect on how they can improve their work. Tutors support pupils closely when they choose subjects or face challenges. Drama helps many pupils express themselves, understand others and grow more comfortable speaking in front of people. Pupils who have SEND receive steady, thoughtful support that develops their confidence to engage with learning. Leadership roles in houses, chapel or pupil groups also develop pupils' confidence through enabling them to voice opinions and organise successful events.

30. The PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes develop pupils' understanding of healthy relationships, how to manage emotions and how to support their own emotional and physical wellbeing. Teachers approach potentially sensitive topics such as puberty with clarity, which helps pupils explore potentially difficult themes without embarrassment. Pupils explain that these lessons help them develop empathy, emotional understanding and resilience. External speakers broaden pupils' knowledge on online addiction, gambling and emerging risks related to online safety.

31. Chapel and assemblies reinforce key values such as kindness, responsibility and gratitude, and pupils enjoy leading some services themselves. The school provides a well-planned programme of character development that encourages pupils to reflect on non-material aspects of life such as the moral and spiritual perspectives of different faiths and beliefs.

32. The physical education (PE) department delivers an inclusive and comprehensive programme that supports both competitive athletes and recreational learners. Teachers help pupils understand how their bodies work by explaining muscle groups, movement and healthy training habits. Teachers provide pupils with 'fitness plans' that are tailored to their age, sporting activity and ambitions so that pupils develop their skills and strength in their chosen sporting area. The co-curricular sport offer includes fives, basketball, fitness cycles, aerobics and outdoor pursuits. These opportunities give pupils enjoyable ways to stay active. Coaches emphasise teamwork, resilience and continuous improvement.

33. Clear expectations and consistent routines promote good behaviour across the school. Staff actively monitor pupils' behaviour and intervene quickly and effectively when any behavioural issues arise. Inclusive house structures encourage pupils to mix across year groups, form friendships and treat each other with respect. Teachers maintain calm learning environments. There are few bullying incidents.

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34. Leadership ensures a visible and consistent staff presence across the school. Boarders feel secure in the house because they have access to a member of staff overnight should support be required.

35. Leaders ensure that suitable and accurate admission and attendance registers are maintained. Patterns of absence are monitored and resolved where required. Leaders inform the local authority about any attendance concerns and about pupils who leave and join the school at non-standard transition points.

36. Leaders implement effective and robust health and safety and fire safety arrangements, including through systematic checks and servicing of equipment, so that the premises are methodically maintained. There is a robust process of review by the health and safety committee to ensure that maintenance and fire safety procedures are effectively implemented. Throughout the school, fire extinguishers and first aid kits are located in appropriate areas. Fire systems are checked appropriately, and fire evacuation drills are routinely held, including during boarding hours.

37. Boarding houses provide warm, structured and supportive communities. House parents, matrons and tutors build positive relationships with pupils and respond quickly to any concerns. Pupils personalise their rooms, follow clear routines and enjoy a sense of independence. The medical centre gives reliable care, handles injuries and illness calmly, and supports pupils' emotional needs with patience and understanding. Staff keep careful records and stay in close contact with families when needed.

38. Leaders arrange school life to encourage pupils to feel part of a close, friendly community. They train older pupils so they can offer guidance, listen to worries and model sensible behaviour for younger pupils. Monitors receive advice on how to carry out their roles well, and they take their responsibilities seriously. Houses organise events, competitions and themed evenings that help pupils make friends across different age groups.

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. The school develops pupils' understanding of the world beyond the classroom effectively. Assemblies, visiting speakers and themed events help pupils think about society, public issues and cultural diversity. In lessons, pupils regularly discuss the different perspectives of people representing different cultures and backgrounds, on issues such as family life, gender roles and human rights and responsibilities. Such discussions foster pupils' understanding of diversity and their tolerance and respect for different people.

41. Pupils develop their sense of responsibility towards the community during activities such as volunteering as part of the 'community action team', through which they participate in local charity and community projects such as visiting older people in care homes. Such activities broaden pupils' understanding of how people live, work and co-operate in wider society.

42. The curriculum enables pupils to develop their economic understanding. Financial education is embedded within PSHE, where pupils learn about considerations such as budgeting, mortgages and the risks associated with gambling. In addition, weekly classes for pupils in Year 11 link economic issues and current affairs. Such learning prepares pupils to make informed decisions in their future lives.

43. The school builds pupils' understanding of key social values such as fairness, respect, responsibility and the rule of law. Chapel, tutor discussions and subject lessons introduce pupils to ideas about decision-making, justice, democracy and community. Participation in the school council and committees gives pupils practical experience of debating issues and voting on decisions intended to help improve school life. Pupils learn why rules matter, how local and national government function and how these influence change. Staff provide guidance when pupils encounter political topics, to ensure that discussion remains thoughtful and unbiased. These experiences help pupils understand citizens' responsibilities and give them confidence to engage with public issues respectfully, listen to different viewpoints and contribute to group decisions.

44. Pupils receive detailed and thorough careers education that helps them plan their futures with substantial confidence. They meet employers, attend fairs, take part in workshops and hear from visiting professionals representing many industries. Staff guide pupils carefully through subject choices, decisions about university courses, apprenticeships and work experience. Pupils learn how to prepare a CV, understand recruitment processes, explore their particular skills and aptitudes and consider long-term goals. Online tools and resources give them access to up-to-date information about jobs, training routes and higher education. The vast majority of pupils progress to university, including selective institutions, while others move into skilled apprenticeships or employment. The combination of thorough and well-tailored advice, work experience and encouragement helps pupils make informed decisions based on a realistic sense of future possibilities and how best to prepare for them.

45. Pupils gain leadership experience through many roles within the school. Older pupils act as mentors, monitors, chapel leaders and activity helpers. In boarding houses, they support younger pupils, organise events and help maintain a positive community. Staff guide pupils so they understand how to use responsibility wisely and act as positive role models. The school council and eco groups give pupils the chance to voice ideas, influence decisions and work collaboratively on improvements.

Pupils appreciate that their views matter and that leaders respond thoughtfully to their suggestions. Through these roles, pupils learn confidence, public speaking, reliability and teamwork. These skills prepare pupils for leadership beyond school.

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

46. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

47. There is a vigilant culture of safeguarding in the school. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities respond promptly and appropriately to any safeguarding concerns that arise. They consult with external safeguarding partners and refer safeguarding concerns to them when appropriate. Suitable arrangements for the handling of allegations against staff or senior leaders, including low-level concerns, are in place. Leaders keep suitable records of safeguarding concerns and the decisions and actions taken in response to these.

48. Governors maintain an effective overview of the safeguarding policy and procedures. The governors with particular responsibility for safeguarding conduct thorough reviews of safeguarding practice at the school. All governors undertake suitable training in safeguarding.

49. Safeguarding induction and training for staff, including for the safeguarding team, are thorough, regular and in line with local requirements. Leaders provide safeguarding updates and scenario-based training for all staff, supplemented by online courses which assess staff understanding. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and know how to escalate concerns when required.

50. Leaders provide a number of ways for pupils to raise any concerns that they might have. Pupils are informed to whom they can go should they wish to share any concerns. The availability and the role of the school's independent person are known to boarders.

51. Leaders ensure that all appropriate safer recruitment checks on adults who work with pupils or reside in boarding houses are made in a timely manner and accurately recorded in a suitable single central record of appointments (SCR).

52. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. A suitable internet filtering and monitoring system is in place. Any alerts are swiftly reviewed by members of the safeguarding team, who take action as required. These systems are tested regularly by the school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

53. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Blundell's School
Department for Education number	878/6011
Registered charity number	1081249
Address	Blundell's School Blundell's Road Tiverton Devon EX16 4DN
Phone number	01884 252543
Email address	info@blundells.org
Website	www.blundells.org
Proprietor	Blundell's School
Chair	Mr Nigel Hall
Headteacher	Mr Bart Wielenga
Age range	11 to 19
Number of pupils	590
Number of boarding pupils	300
Date of previous inspection	22 to 23 September 2022

Information about the school

54. Blundell's School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school in Tiverton, Devon. The school was originally founded in 1604 and is overseen by a board of governors. Blundell's Preparatory School is located on the same campus but is inspected separately.

55. Boarders are accommodated in seven houses on the school site. There is one co-educational boarding house for pupils in Years 7 and 8, five single-sex houses for pupils in Years 9 to 12 and a co-educational boarding house for pupils in Year 13.

56. The school has identified 173 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

57. The school has identified 32 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.

58. The school states its aims are to educate pupils around the concepts of 'roots' and 'wings', to give pupils a grounding in skills and values upon which to build their lives (roots) whilst encouraging passion for adventure and discovery in the future (wings). The school aims for its pupils to become dynamic learners whose love of learning will see them thrive.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	2 to 4 December 2025

59. A team of eight inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

60. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and chapel services
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and another governor
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

61. 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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