

School inspection report

2 to 4 December 2025

Brentwood School

Middleton Hall Lane
Brentwood
Essex
CM15 8EE

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders and governors provide clear strategic direction informed by the school's values of virtue, learning and manners. Governors know the school well and provide rigorous, well-informed and effective oversight of leaders' decisions and the arrangements for safeguarding. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and consistently implemented. Risk management is thorough across all aspects of school life.
2. Leaders have developed a curriculum which is broad, balanced and inclusive. This enables pupils to make good progress and develop confidence. Teaching is generally purposeful, well planned and features consistently secure subject knowledge. However, in some lessons, opportunities for pupils to develop self-motivation, intellectual curiosity and the skills of independent thinking and learning are not always fully realised.
3. Leaders provide an expansive and inclusive co-curricular programme that enables pupils to benefit from a wide range of well-resourced activities, including those relating to the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE), and extensive opportunities in outdoor education, sport and the performing arts. This provision successfully develops pupils' additional skills and knowledge and supports their personal development and self-confidence.
4. A well-structured personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) programme promote healthy relationships, personal safety and moral awareness. Behaviour is positive and inclusive, supported by an approach that encourages pupils to reflect on their actions and tailored strategies to support pupils affected by behaviour issues. Boarding accommodation provides a suitable and caring environment.
5. Leaders provide an inclusive and well-balanced physical education (PE) programme that enables pupils of all abilities to participate fully and make good progress. A broad range of sports and clear progression criteria support holistic development, competitive spirit and pupils' success at high levels.
6. Leaders ensure that health and safety procedures, including those relating to first aid and fire safety, are robust.
7. Pupils demonstrate respect, responsibility and cultural awareness, supported by opportunities for leadership and community engagement. Careers education is impartial and comprehensive, preparing pupils effectively for future pathways. Financial literacy and economic understanding are embedded effectively within the curriculum. Pupils develop a secure understanding of British values, such as that of mutual respect, and are well prepared for their next steps in life.
8. Safeguarding arrangements are effective, with clear policies and rigorous recruitment checks. Staff receive regular training and demonstrate secure knowledge of their responsibilities. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Leaders respond swiftly and appropriately to any safeguarding concerns raised.

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 consistently enables all pupils to develop self-motivation, intellectual curiosity and the skill to think and learn for themselves.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders create an environment where the school's aims and values of virtue, learning and manners are promoted effectively. Leaders are aspirational for their pupils and set high expectations of academic performance and personal, social and moral development. Leaders ensure that comprehensive policies and procedures are established and applied consistently and in line with statutory guidance.
10. Leaders implement comprehensive and systematic evaluation of the work of the school. They take into account the views of parents, pupils and staff when determining areas of development. Senior leaders present updates of the school's performance to governors at an annual strategy planning day.
11. Governors evaluate rigorously the work of the leadership team through the effective use of a wide range of relevant information. They receive and scrutinise detailed reports on all aspects of the school's provision, conduct school visits, and meet regularly with senior leaders. These activities enable governors to provide both informed support and appropriate challenge, contributing to ongoing school improvement and the successful implementation of the agreed strategic actions. Governors ensure that leaders possess the required knowledge and skills and fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the school consistently meets the Standards.
12. Leaders and governors implement a thorough and effective approach to risk management. A comprehensive suite of risk assessments is in place, covering all aspects of school life, including the site, curriculum, educational visits, the boarding house, and off-site activities. These assessments are reviewed regularly and proportionate action is taken to ensure that identified risks are mitigated appropriately. Arrangements to support pupils who require additional pastoral care are carefully and sensitively considered as part of risk assessment. As a result, the management of risk across the school is typically thorough and contributes effectively to the safety and wellbeing of all pupils.
13. A clear and suitable three-stage complaints policy is available to parents. Staff are trained to address informal concerns promptly and effectively, while formal complaints are handled rigorously by senior leaders, following the established policy.
14. The school website provides access to an appropriate range of policies and other information. Parents receive regular and timely communication and reports about their child's progress and attainment. Leaders provide the local authority with all necessary information relating to the use of funds for any pupils with education, health and care plans (EHC plans).
15. Effective liaison is maintained with external agencies, such as local safeguarding partners, to access specialist support for pupils when needed.
16. The school implements a suitable accessibility plan. Leaders ensure that no pupils are discriminated against. The school meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

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

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. The school's curriculum is broad, enriching and engaging. It is implemented effectively through appropriate schemes of work that plan the development of key academic skills across carefully tailored and inclusive programmes of study.
19. In the early years, children experience a broad, balanced and well-planned curriculum that promotes curiosity, early academic foundations and enjoyment of learning. Activities are closely matched to children's interests and developmental needs. Skilled modelling and rich vocabulary are used to extend children's language and thinking. Daily routines, stories, songs and well-managed indoor and outdoor learning opportunities ensure progression in communication, literacy, physical development and personal skills. Recreational opportunities, such as outdoor learning, creative play, and fine-motor stations, enhance engagement and enable children to explore, collaborate and develop self-confidence. Inclusive practice ensures all children, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) participate fully. As a result, children demonstrate sustained focus, independence and enjoyment, building secure foundations that prepare them effectively for Year 1 and future learning.
20. In the prep school, the curriculum is further enriched by the addition of specialist teaching in science, information and communication technology (ICT), food and nutrition, design and technology (DT), languages, music, art, games, drama and outdoor learning. An inquiry-based approach to humanities subjects enables pupils to draw connections between different areas of learning and to develop appropriate skills and knowledge.
21. The curriculum in the senior school further develops opportunities for enrichment and challenge to promote the development of new knowledge and skills. The languages provision allows pupils to gain an understanding of French, Spanish, Italian, German, Chinese, Latin and classical Greek and options in these, and in creative subjects, support the school's aim that there is 'something for everyone'. As a result, leaders provide pupils with a diverse, flexible and broad curriculum post-GCSE, where BTEC Extended Diploma courses, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and A Levels enable pupils to choose an appropriate, tailored pathway. As a result, pupils make good progress.
22. Teachers demonstrate consistently secure subject knowledge, and the most effective lessons are well planned and purposeful, use a variety of teaching methods, and enable pupils to make good progress. The 'Brentwood Way', an approach that outlines consistent boundaries, which are clearly understood by staff and pupils, combined with the school's values, further promotes the effectiveness of teaching. Pupils make good progress, feel supported in their learning and develop their understanding, confidence and skills. However, in some lessons, teaching does not foster pupils' application of intellectual curiosity, their self-motivation or the ability to think and learn for themselves.
23. As a result of an effective school-wide approach to teachers' verbal and written feedback, pupils understand the progress they make, allowing them to develop their skills appropriately. Effective feedback, targeted support, use of personal reflection time and the ensuring of pupils' understanding of success criteria are securely in place, supporting pupils to make good progress and develop their skills and knowledge.

24. Leaders use robust systems to track pupils' progress over time. They use assessments and baseline data to regularly analyse results to identify curriculum and learning gaps. Pupils who underperform against their predicted outcomes, receive timely, personalised support, which leads to improved attainment. Leaders adapt curriculum planning, based on their analysis of pupils' performance, to take account of pupils' needs. They ensure that pupils benefit from personalised guidance when required, such as through one-to-one meetings. Such guidance improves pupils' engagement and eventual progression to suitable post-16 and post-18 routes.

25. Regular and effective communication between teaching and boarding staff ensures that boarding staff are aware of the academic profile and performance of each boarder and provide support as required. Boarders are supported during boarding time and helped to make progress.

26. Pupils who have SEND are supported by appropriately trained staff who demonstrate detailed knowledge of, and consistently supportive care for, those pupils. Subject leaders track attainment and progress data relating to these pupils to ensure appropriate additional support is provided in a timely manner when required.

27. The needs of pupils who speak English as additional language (EAL) are identified early and are measured using age-related standardised tests to ensure appropriate support is provided so they make good progress in their development of English.

28. Leaders provide an expansive, inclusive and highly varied co-curricular programme, part of which is timetabled in the school day to ensure all pupils can benefit from its breadth. Provision includes well-resourced CCF and DofE activities and a varied programme of volunteering and outdoor education. A wide range of activities and clubs have been developed in response to pupils' suggestions, such as darts, dance, and self-defence clubs. The provision for sport and the performing arts across the whole school is extensive and develops pupils' skills and knowledge in a range of areas. For example, in the senior school, the 'specialist music programme' provides opportunities to stretch musicians with higher levels of attainment, whilst providing opportunities for all musicians. As a result, pupils benefit from a considerable choice of activities in which they learn a wide range of new skills and develop existing ones, often to an advanced standard.

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. Leaders provide a well-planned PSHE and RSE curriculum, which takes into consideration the views of pupils and parents. Pupils build secure knowledge and understanding of aspects of healthy and unhealthy relationships, personal safety and responsible decision-making around topics such as consent, peer and online pressure and contraception.
31. In the early years, calm routines, warm relationships and consistent reassurance from staff support children's development of emotional wellbeing. Children settle quickly, develop self-confidence and engage enthusiastically in both indoor and outdoor activities that promote physical development, resilience and independence. Regular PSHE sessions and sensitive staff modelling help children to recognise and manage their emotions and develop respectful communication and co-operation skills to form secure foundations for future wellbeing.
32. The warm and caring professional relationships established in the early years are sustained throughout the school. Leaders and staff provide pupils with effective pastoral care and acknowledge their achievements. For example, the provision of 'time to change', mediation sessions and the wellbeing hub support pupils' self-awareness and feelings of security. As a result, pupils develop their self-confidence and self-esteem.
33. Leaders support the development of pupils' spiritual and moral understanding through a values-led approach that is embedded across the curriculum and wider school life. Opportunities for reflection and discussion in assemblies, chapel, wellbeing lessons and theology and philosophy lessons enable pupils to explore and develop their spiritual and moral awareness in a thoughtful and inclusive manner.
34. Leaders are committed to high standards of behaviour through providing an approach which encourages pupils to reflect upon their actions when dealing with issues that arise. Behaviour management strategies are tailored to meet individual pupils' needs and encourage pupils to develop mutual trust and respect for others. Pupils learn about different types of bullying and the harm they can cause and receive clear advice on what to do if they are worried about bullying. This approach impacts and minimises bullying at all stages in the school.
35. The inclusive PE programme enables pupils of all ages and abilities to participate and make good progress. Teachers use their expertise to plan activities that meet pupils' needs and aptitudes. Pupils develop sport-specific physical skills as well as understanding the importance of teamwork and winning and losing with good grace. A wide range of sports and games promotes enjoyment and high levels of engagement and participation rates are consistently high. The curriculum strikes an effective balance between high-level performance sport, physical literacy and developing pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles. Competitive success is clearly evident, but the overarching emphasis remains on participation and holistic physical development. Clear criteria, such as the 'emerging, exploring, flourishing' approach, support pupils in recognising their skills and identifying next steps, while opportunities for peer assessment in activities such as swimming and athletic development enhance their analytical skills.
36. Boarding accommodation is well maintained and contains suitable facilities, including for sleeping and washing. All policies, records and documents required by the National Minimum Standards for

boarding schools (NMS) are maintained and carefully monitored. Boarders are cared for in a secure and homely environment. Relationships between boarders and boarding staff are warm and supportive. Boarders' needs are met within a supportive and carefully managed environment.

37. Leaders provide effective oversight so that health and safety arrangements, which include regular checks, servicing and clear record-keeping, align with statutory requirements to promote the wellbeing of pupils. Regulatory fire safety requirements are followed and regular evacuation drills, including in boarding, are carried out appropriately. The premises and accommodation contain suitable facilities, including appropriate outdoor space, and are well-maintained.
38. Arrangements for the care of pupils who are injured or become unwell, including the secure storage and administration of medicines, accurate record-keeping and effective communication with parents, are appropriate and supported by suitable accommodation. Staff, including those working in the early years, receive relevant and up-to-date first aid training.
39. Admission and attendance registers are accurately maintained in accordance with current statutory requirements. Registers are completed twice daily, and robust procedures ensure that all absences are promptly followed up and recorded in line with current guidance. Leaders notify the local authority when pupils join or leave the school outside standard transition points. Attendance is monitored effectively, and leaders and staff actively promote high levels of attendance.

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. The school successfully challenges pupils to develop an increasingly mature sense of social responsibility and cultural awareness. As pupils progress through the school, the inclusive and caring community carefully created by leaders, enables pupils to feel secure to form views and take actions based on principles of mutual respect and to contribute positively to the school community.
42. The school develops pupils' sense of responsibility towards others in the wider community. For example, senior pupils support younger pupils from the prep and local schools in athletics and performing arts events. Pupils also engage in charitable fundraising activities and opportunities to contribute to the local community, for example, performing to local care home residents.
43. Leaders provide opportunities within and beyond the formal curriculum to enhance pupils' understanding of British values and the roles they can play as citizens. Through a range of activities, such as targeted assemblies, a programme of external speakers, a business enrichment programme, and the implementation of the 'big conversation', pupils' understanding of life in British society is enhanced. They develop skills and knowledge needed to contribute to society in the future.
44. In the early years, children develop their social skills and awareness through structured routines, purposeful play and positive modelling of expected conduct and manners by adults. From an early stage, pupils develop skills such as taking turns, sharing resources and helping peers. Weekly PSHE lessons support children's emotional literacy and social awareness, helping them to manage their feelings and interact kindly. Secure relationships with trusted adults foster confidence, empathy and a sense of early civic responsibility.
45. Pupils' understanding of democracy is developed through their participation in mock elections and voting for prefects and house captains, which enable them to appreciate fairness, responsibility and the impact of collective decision-making.
46. Furthermore, pupils develop a keen awareness of the political landscape in the UK, drawing upon aspects of the law and the workings of parliamentary democracy. For example, pupils in Year 9 learn about the functions of the Houses of Parliament and pupils in the sixth form consider global politics as part of their extended project qualification (EPQ). Through timetabled wellbeing sessions and politics lessons, leaders ensure that pupils develop a rich and varied understanding of social and cultural issues, tolerance and respect, which encourages pupils to take ownership of and responsibility for their own behaviour, recognising the impact it can have on others. For example, pupils make links between their understanding of right and wrong in school and the rule of law in the wider world, and learn how the positions of responsibility they hold in school help prepare them for roles in society.
47. Throughout the school, pupils are given opportunities to contribute to their community through a range of leadership roles. In the prep school, school council representatives, eco-ambassadors, playground leaders and school prefects assist in the smooth running of the school, and in the senior school, a rigorous application process places pupils into senior positions, for example peer mentors, where they can contribute to leaders' decision-making.

48. Leaders develop pupils' understanding of careers through opportunities in the prep school to hear from adults from a range of professions and with varied skills. In the senior school pupils' understanding is further developed through the use of online platforms, interactions with employers, advice on writing CVs and personal statements, practical experiences and a programme of visiting speakers. Pupils receive impartial, well-informed guidance about post-16 and post-18 options, including how to apply for apprenticeships, employment opportunities and UK and overseas university options. Leaders enable pupils to understand the impact of subject choices on entry to different professions and consider diverse career options. Pupils learn to challenge perceived gender stereotyping in career choices, and are guided to be able to make informed decisions to support future aspirations.

49. The curriculum develops pupils' economic awareness through a range of planned activities in the early years and prep school. Financial literacy forms part of the mathematics curriculum in the senior school and opportunities to consider the financial, marketing and entrepreneurial aspects of running a business, such as a theme park, support pupils' understanding of credit, debt, saving, borrowing and budgeting processes. As a result, pupils are well prepared to manage their own finances when they leave school.

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

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

51. Leaders ensure there is a robust culture of safeguarding across the school. A suitable safeguarding policy and procedures are in place and in line with the requirements of current statutory guidance.
52. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities respond swiftly and appropriately when concerns are raised. They consult with external agencies and make referrals when necessary. Clear procedures for managing allegations against staff, including low-level concerns, are in place and well understood by staff. Records of concerns, and of the decisions, actions and rationale taken, are detailed and secure.
53. Governors provide effective oversight of safeguarding. A governor with specific responsibility for safeguarding undertakes regular and thorough reviews of practice providing leaders with appropriate challenge. All governors complete appropriate safeguarding training and understand their statutory responsibilities.
54. Safeguarding induction and ongoing training for staff, including the safeguarding team, are comprehensive, regular and aligned with current requirements. Leaders provide updates and scenario-based training, supplemented by questionnaires and discussions to check understanding. As a result, staff demonstrate a secure knowledge of their safeguarding duties and understand how to escalate concerns promptly.
55. Leaders have a clear awareness of contextual safeguarding risks that could affect pupils, including those related to radicalisation and extremism.
56. Pupils have several appropriate routes through which they can raise concerns. They can speak to trusted adults and boarders understand the availability and role of the school's independent person.
57. Leaders ensure that all required safer recruitment checks on adults working with pupils or residing in boarding accommodation are undertaken in a timely manner and accurately recorded in a well-maintained single central record of appointments (SCR). Staff files are systematically organised and comply with current government guidance.
58. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place, and alerts are promptly reviewed by the safeguarding team, who take appropriate action. These systems are tested regularly to ensure they remain effective.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Brentwood School
Department for Education number	881/6035
Registered charity number	1153605
Address	Brentwood School Middleton Hall Lane Brentwood Essex CM15 8EE
Phone number	01277 243243
Email address	headmaster@brentwood.essex.sch.uk
Website	www.brentwoodschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Brentwood School
Chair	Lord Black of Brentwood
Headteacher	Mr Michael Bond
Age range	3 to 19
Number of pupils	1852
Number of boarding pupils	89
Date of previous inspection	14 to 15 September 2022

Information about the school

60. Brentwood School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school located in the centre of Brentwood. Founded in 1557, it is a charity administered by a governing body. The prep and senior schools are situated a short distance apart within the school grounds. Male and female pupils aged from 3 to 11 years and those in the sixth form are educated in co-educational classes. From the ages of 11 to 16 years, pupils are taught in classes separated by gender and take part jointly in all other activities except gender-based sport.
61. The current chair and vice-chair of governors took up their positions in March 2024 and the current head of the prep school in September 2024. A new boarding house was opened in autumn term 2025.
62. Boarding accommodation is provided in a single boarding house for pupils from the age of 11 years.
63. The early years caters for 48 children in three foundation classes and 52 children in three Reception classes.
64. The school has identified 164 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
65. The school has identified 149 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
66. The school states its aims are to ensure that each individual pupil becomes the best version of themselves by developing virtue, learning and manners. The school intends that pupils feel safe and valued within an inclusive community. It seeks to provide a wide range of opportunities that enable pupils to develop their potential, enjoy their learning and achieve successful academic outcomes. The school endeavours to inspire pupils to develop as intellectually curious and resilient young adults with the confidence and leadership skills to work collaboratively and care for others. It aims to challenge pupils to develop a secure moral purpose and to take principled action within the school, the local community and the wider international context.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	2 to 4 December 2025
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67. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

68. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to 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.

69. 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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For more information, please visit isi.net