

School inspection report

6 to 8 May 2026

Altrincham Preparatory School

Marlborough Road

Bowdon

Altrincham

WA14 2RR

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. Governors are effective in their oversight of the school. They work closely with leaders to promote the school's ethos. A collaborative approach to self-evaluation ensures that the board's strategic vision aligns closely with the school's aims and values. The wellbeing of staff and pupils is at the heart of leaders' decision-making.
2. Leaders carefully consider their approach to teaching and learning, taking into account their knowledge of their pupils. As a result, pupils benefit from an ambitious, rich and cohesive curriculum taught by skilled and dedicated staff. Pupils make good progress. Leaders hold staff to account appropriately. They constantly strive to improve pupils' experiences through regular reviews and reflection on the quality of provision.
3. Secure systems track pupils' progress in mathematics and English, including for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They ensure effective and robust monitoring of children's development in the early years. This information is used to inform teaching, learning and wider curriculum decisions. However, this approach does not currently extend to the non-core subjects, such as Spanish, music and physical education (PE).
4. Leaders and staff prioritise pupils' wellbeing. Positive relationships between pupils and trusted adults ensure an environment where pupils feel respected and safe. Incidents of bullying and unkindness are rare, but when they do occur, leaders take robust and effective action.
5. Leaders maintain the site with meticulous care. They ensure a warm, welcoming and safe environment for pupils. Pupils' learning and wellbeing are enhanced by regular and structured access to outdoor areas. A culture of risk mitigation is in place, which is effectively overseen by governors.
6. Leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next part of their education and beyond. Opportunities are provided for pupils to celebrate their own cultures and learn about the cultures of their peers. Adults model the school's value of respect. It is evident in pupils' interactions with each other and in their wider community. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to engage in their local community, not only by supporting charitable endeavours but also through their programme of visits to local places of worship and care homes.
7. Pupils develop a firm grasp of British values. Leaders promote these through the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum. They also ensure that pupils learn about prospective careers and develop economic understanding and financial literacy.
8. Leaders apply rigour to their safeguarding procedures. They log and follow up all concerns effectively. Their work with safeguarding partners, including governors, ensures that the school's safeguarding culture is embedded.

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 assessment information is captured accurately and that it is used to plan for pupils' learning consistently effectively across all non-core subjects.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders' skills and knowledge result in thoughtful self-evaluation. Their reviews take appropriate account of the context of the school and the local area. They use the information to identify and prioritise areas for development. The senior leadership team meets regularly to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their actions. They share this information with governors. The robust process enhances the provision for pupils' wellbeing, as well as the richness and breadth of the curriculum, including for pupils who have SEND or those who may need mental health support. The school's values of excellence, kindness and curiosity guide their decisions. These values are evident in all aspects of the school's offer. They are part of the daily experience of both pupils and staff.
10. Governors provide effective oversight through a programme of regular board meetings, meetings with school leaders and school visits. They engage fully in setting clear direction, especially that linked to the school's strategic development and financial sustainability. Their oversight is supported by detailed monthly reports. Monitoring is strengthened through reviews of the school's risk register, scrutiny of health and safety reports, as well as consideration of operational and strategic risks. This approach underpins the well-embedded culture of accountability. The board actively recruits governors with specific knowledge and skills to ensure that they have the required experience to fulfil their responsibility.
11. Leaders have substantial knowledge of how children in the early years learn and develop. The ambitious early years curriculum means that pupils make good progress in all areas of their learning. Supportive and skilled staff plan age-appropriate and stimulating activities using a range of resources designed to capture children's interests. Regular assessments and careful, detailed tracking of pupils' learning allow staff to identify individual children's needs accurately, to adapt the curriculum and to provide appropriate support.
12. The school's comprehensive and well-structured suite of policies are reviewed regularly. They align with statutory requirements and current government guidance. The policies include those relating to safeguarding, attendance, and relationships and sex education (RSE). All the required information is made available to parents of current and prospective pupils, mostly through the school's website. This includes policies, previous inspection reports and the complaints procedure.
13. Leaders share all the required information about individual pupils with parents and external agencies as appropriate. They keep parents up to date about their child's performance through regular and detailed written reports. They inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave at non-standard transition points. Although there are currently no pupils at the school who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), leaders understand their responsibilities should any pupils have one. They work closely with specialist external teams to support pupils' safeguarding and mental health needs.
14. Leaders ensure that the school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. A suitable accessibility plan is drawn up and reviewed regularly. This means that reasonable adjustments are made to the curriculum, the facilities and activities to ensure that all pupils are included.
15. Leaders actively seek and respond to parental feedback both formally and informally. Complaints are handled in line with the policy, with comprehensive records detailing the process, actions taken, timescales and outcomes. This structured approach supports transparency and accountability. As a

result, communication systems are well established and contribute to positive engagement with parents.

16. Senior leaders model the hard work and collaboration that they expect of middle leaders. They promote thoughtful evaluation of teaching and learning, as well as encouraging the auditing and review of departmental action plans. A culture of accountability and continuous improvement exists across the school. Pupils' learning continues to improve as a result.

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. In the early years, the detailed and inclusive curriculum is ambitious. It covers all areas of learning, including early reading and mathematics. It is adapted effectively to meet children's needs, including those who have SEND. Early years teaching is purposeful. It is supported by effective assessment and tracking of children's learning. Staff identify children's needs accurately. They provide targeted actions to support them. Well-established, effective partnerships with parents ensure consistency between home and school. Phonics workshops and a home-school workbook, for example, facilitate a collaborative approach in supporting children's learning. As a result, children make good progress from their starting points, including in developing secure early literacy and communication skills.
19. Curriculum design considers the requirements of the entrance examinations for selective schools. Pupils' progression from the early years through to the end of Year 6 is set out clearly. Leaders know that pupils' personal development is important. They implement a curriculum that is rich and broad, focusing on building pupils' depth of understanding across a variety of subjects. Lessons are typically well planned to provide pupils with knowledge of the world around them. Specialist teachers of art, design and technology, music, PE, drama and foreign languages bring passion and ambition. Pupils value their expertise. The curriculum is appropriate to the age and stage of development of pupils. It recognises the higher prior attainment of many pupils, as well as responding to the needs of those pupils who have SEND. Careful oversight of teaching and learning means that teachers' planning is scrutinised. Pupils' work is monitored through book looks and lesson observations. This ensures consistency and improves pupils' learning experience.
20. The well-established trusting and respectful relationships underpin pupils' wellbeing and self-esteem. Pupils are engaged and invested in their learning. They reflect carefully on their progress. Pupils share their thinking with teachers. This encourages participation and develops pupils' self-esteem. Pupils are comfortable working collaboratively, for example in the very focused rehearsals for the Year 6 play, involving pupils working in small groups to support their learning.
21. Leaders in the early years, as well as in the core subjects of mathematics and English, ensure that pupils' progress is checked and tracked carefully. A similar approach is taken to monitoring the progress of pupils who have SEND. However, this assessment information is not formally collected or analysed outside of core curriculum areas. As result, leaders in these areas rely on anecdotal evidence to inform their decisions. Leaders know this and are working on improvements. However, this work is at an early stage.
22. Children's communication and language development is prioritised in the early years. Teaching is consistently effective, precise and responsive. Adults model the sounds that letters make accurately, using clear explanations and visual prompts. Children demonstrate high levels of engagement and concentration. They recognise and articulate a wide range of graphemes confidently, blending sounds to read words and applying newly taught vocabulary with accuracy.
23. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive individual and in-class support. Leaders track their progress throughout the year and at transition points against the Department for Education (DfE) proficiency in English scale and adapt their support to meet pupils' needs. As a result, pupils make good progress in English.

24. Pupils benefit from the extensive enrichment programme, including before-school, lunchtime and after-school clubs. These activities provide opportunities for collaboration and teamwork, as seen in football and other sports clubs. Independence and creativity are fostered in the outdoor learning club, where pupils make toy cars and tracks using the natural environment. Pupils also enjoy coming out of their comfort zones in the skateboarding club. They gain self-confidence and learn to manage risk. Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from time in the outdoors, where they learn to appreciate being in nature. The adventure playground, the field and the outdoor learning area, for example, enrich the curriculum and promote pupils' mental and physical wellbeing effectively.

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

25. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

26. The PSHE curriculum design ensures pupils' social and cultural development. Pupils are taught about RSE in timetabled PSHE lessons. A comprehensive scheme of work ensures that topics such as different family structures, puberty, consent and human reproduction are covered. Leaders provide parents with detailed information about the content taught. This provides them with the opportunity to ask questions and to withdraw their children from the sex education components of the curriculum.
27. Teachers support pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing. They help pupils to feel respected and valued in the school. The early morning club is designed to strengthen pupils' learning and build a positive start to their day. Staff trained in mental health first aid are on hand to support pupils when required. A well-structured identification and tiered support system allows pastoral leaders to provide additional help for pupils when they need it.
28. Pupils across year groups benefit from specialist teaching in PE lessons. In the early years, the focus is on developing fine and gross motor skills, eye-hand co-ordination, balance and agility. This becomes more complex as pupils progress through the school. Older pupils learn specific sporting skills, such as teamwork and sportsmanship. Teachers use their general understanding of pupils' work to adapt the curriculum and their teaching. However, there is no formal approach in place to track, assess and plan for pupils' progress more precisely.
29. In the early years, adults ensure that children are taught how to behave. They follow well-established routines. Staffing ratios ensure pupils are well supervised. Ongoing, positive discussions and interactions between children and staff during play, along with modelling and praise, encourage children's positive behaviour.
30. Leaders have high expectations for pupils' conduct. The effective behaviour management system allows pupils to understand and respect classroom expectations. The school's three rules, to be 'ready', 'respectful' and 'safe', are reinforced regularly throughout the school. The school's approach to behaviour management is positive and effective. Staff use praise and rewards appropriately. This creates a calm and purposeful atmosphere, enhancing pupils' learning. Leaders log and track behaviour incidents. This allows them to identify trends and respond accordingly. Bullying incidents are rare. If unkindness is encountered, it is dealt with effectively by staff and meticulously recorded. Pupils are confident to raise concerns, in the knowledge that they will be listened to and supported.
31. Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from the embedded values of excellence, kindness and curiosity. These values permeate pupils' experiences and are actively encouraged. Pupils win badges for being kind and gain 'golden tickets' carrying lunchtime rewards. This incentivises them to strive to exhibit these values. In the early years, children are encouraged to celebrate kindness through a 'kindness king' and 'golden moments' of kindness. This reinforces their positive behaviour. Pupils show appreciation to staff who clean the school, offering help and verbal thanks.
32. Leaders have implemented an effective health and safety policy that ensures the premises and accommodation are well maintained and conducive to teaching and learning. High levels of pupil supervision continue throughout the day. Appropriate arrangements for medical and first aid are in place, with sufficient staff trained in paediatric first aid.

33. Leaders maintain appropriate admission and attendance registers. Pupils' absences are recorded and followed up effectively. Leaders understand the statutory guidance. They liaise effectively with external agencies, including informing the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.

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

34. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

35. Fundamental British values are taught across year groups. Leaders map these to ensure comprehensive coverage throughout the curriculum. Pupils have a firm grasp of democracy, respect, tolerance, liberty and the rule of law. This understanding is further enhanced through lessons and assemblies. Leaders guide staff appropriately to ensure that opinions and actions do not undermine British values. Effective promotion of these values underpins school life and the school's ethos.
36. Leaders understand pupils' individual needs. The curriculum equips pupils to grow up with tolerance and understanding of the diversity of the world that they will enter. Leaders harness the diversity in the school by celebrating it. During celebrations of Chinese New Year, there was a performance of a traditional dragon dance and Chinese drumming. American Independence Day was marked by incorporating traditional food and activities. In pre-school, during Ramadam, a parent spoke to the pupils to explain the meaning of Ramadam and led a craft session for children to further widen their spiritual and cultural understanding. Pupils celebrate language days and create artwork depicting religious and cultural celebrations. They also visit different places of worship, such as a cathedral and a synagogue.
37. Through the PSHE curriculum, pupils learn about protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010. The 'celebrating difference' topic is used to teach pupils about diversity. It explores themes such as bullying, stereotypes, disability and racism.
38. Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from visiting speakers, including external speakers and parents. These interactions inspire and inform pupils about future careers. Pupils benefit from talks from, for example, a female firefighter and a female engineer to address gender stereotyping.
39. The school's PSHE curriculum includes an effective financial education focus. In the 'money matters' topic, pupils learn about the value of money, budgeting, saving and the difference between needs and wants. Financial literacy is further enhanced by including mathematical problem-solving with a monetary theme, and arithmetical calculations using coins and notes in lessons for younger pupils.
40. Leaders encourage pupils to engage in the democratic process by holding elections for positions of responsibility. These include on the school council, the eco-council and as house captains. Pupils value these positions. They gain leadership skills and learn the importance of taking responsibility as a result.
41. The school's rules of being ready, respectful and safe aid pupils to develop the ability to make good choices. They gain a firm understanding of right and wrong. Leaders provide guidance to staff, encouraging them to talk about recent news events in a manner that encourages tolerance and balance. This supports staff to create a tolerant and respectful school community effectively.
42. Leaders prepare older pupils for the transition to secondary school both academically and socially. Older pupils are given more independence and responsibility. Their horizons are widened through trips, including the Year 6 residential trip to France. This supports pupils' language development, cultural awareness and historical learning, as well as encouraging their independence.

43. Leaders ensure that pupils learn to engage with their wider community with regular visits to a local care home, where pupils perform dance and drama routines. They celebrate Victory in Europe Day with elderly residents. Charity monitors are involved in raising money for charitable causes selected by the pupils. These experiences enhance pupils' understanding of citizenship and the importance of their local community, and further embed the school's culture of inclusion and kindness.

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

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

45. Safeguarding procedures are well established and reviewed regularly to ensure effectiveness. Leaders implement an appropriate and detailed policy that meets the requirements of current statutory guidance. Governors are knowledgeable. They maintain effective oversight of safeguarding arrangements. The safeguarding governor meets regularly with the leader with designated safeguarding responsibilities, providing support and guidance where required. This means that an effective culture of safeguarding exists in the school. Staff take their safeguarding duty seriously. They understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
46. Leaders with safeguarding oversight are trained to an appropriate level. They ensure that their knowledge is current by making use of local and national networks. Staff training reflects the latest statutory guidance. Safeguarding leaders issue regular bulletins that ensure that staff maintain sound knowledge and understanding of existing and emerging safeguarding issues.
47. Comprehensive reporting and monitoring systems mean that leaders have the information they need to keep pupils safe. Concerns are recorded in detail and relevant staff notified. This leads to prompt and appropriate action. Those with designated safeguarding responsibilities and pastoral leaders follow up concerns and monitor the progress of ongoing cases.
48. Pupils have confidence in the adults who look after them. They trust them to listen to their concerns and to respond promptly. Pupils who have SEND are supported through effective support for their safeguarding needs and potential vulnerabilities.
49. Staff have a secure understanding of their duty to report low-level concerns. Leaders keep detailed records of concerns and resulting actions.
50. An effective internet filtering and monitoring system is in place. This ensures pupils are protected from online threats. A comprehensive programme of lessons and workshops develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.
51. Leaders engage actively with the local authority to ensure that the local risk is understood. Well-established reporting pathways support the smooth transfer of information. Leaders work closely with the relevant safeguarding partners and agencies, including early help, children's services and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), to ensure an effective, co-ordinated approach to keeping pupils safe.
52. Leaders carry out the required checks before a new member of staff joins the school. These are accurately documented on the school's single central record of appointments (SCR). The headteacher and the safeguarding governor scrutinise the SCR to ensure that requirements are met.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Altrincham Preparatory School
Department for Education number	358/6002
Address	Altrincham Preparatory School Marlborough Road Bowdon Altrincham Cheshire WA14 2RR
Phone number	0161 928 3366
Email address	admin@altprep.co.uk
Website	www.altprep.co.uk
Proprietor	Altrincham Preparatory School Ltd
Chair	Mr Andrew Hill
Headteacher	Mr Nick Vernon
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	226
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 May 2023

Information about the school

54. Altrincham Preparatory School is an independent day school for male pupils in Altrincham, Cheshire. The school operates on two sites that are a short walk from each other. The early years site is on West Road and the prep on Marlborough Road. The school is owned by a limited company, overseen by a board of governors.
55. There are 50 children in the early years, comprising 35 children in the Nursery and 15 children in the Reception class.
56. The school has identified 33 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 English as an additional language for 80 pupils.
58. The school states its aims are to provide an outstanding, all-round education that enables every boy to thrive, achieve his full potential and grow into a confident, happy and well-rounded individual. Central to this is a commitment to academic excellence, self-discipline and a broad range of co-curricular opportunities, ensuring boys make strong progress and develop both intellectually and personally. The school fosters a supportive and inclusive environment where individuality is celebrated and pupils are encouraged to contribute positively to the community, respecting diversity. The core values of excellence, kindness and curiosity underpin all aspects of school life, promoting ambition, resilience and self-belief; encouraging compassion and respect for others; and inspiring a lifelong love of learning through enquiry, challenge and critical thinking. Ultimately, the school seeks to prepare boys for a successful transition to senior education and equip them with the confidence, skills and curiosity needed for future success.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

6 to 8 May 2026

59. A team of 3 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 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.

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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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