

# School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

## **Clifton High School**

College Road

Clifton

Bristol

BS8 3JD

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 provide regular, systematic oversight of leaders' work, drawing on data, reports and conversations with pupils and staff. Leaders at all levels possess the skills and knowledge needed to promote pupils' wellbeing and consistently meet the Standards.
2. Leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness thoroughly and act on their findings. They manage risks effectively, including those relating to emotional harm. Governors and leaders regularly review the impact of teaching by gender in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9 to ensure it has a positive impact and remains non-discriminatory.
3. Leaders maintain a robust safeguarding culture in which all adults understand that keeping pupils safe is a shared responsibility. The designated safeguarding team is appropriately trained. Staff receive regular updates covering online safety, child-on-child harm and extremist material. Leaders manage safer recruitment thoroughly.
4. Staff have secure subject knowledge, sequence lessons carefully, and take a genuine interest in each pupil. Assessment data is used effectively to adapt teaching so that pupils make good progress.
5. Leaders plan personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) with care, ensuring content is age-appropriate, well sequenced and relevant to the pupils. Topics are revisited annually to secure understanding, and parents are kept well informed. In some PSHE lessons, however, teaching is less consistent.
6. In the early years, staff plan an ambitious, well-resourced curriculum focused on personal, social and emotional development, communication and language, and physical development. Staff use accurate, regular assessments to adapt planning. As a result, children make good progress and are well prepared for their next stage.
7. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified promptly and receive personalised support, including in-lesson adaptations and specialist input. Leaders provide training to staff in strategies to support pupils.
8. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive structured vocabulary support and participate confidently in lessons.
9. Leaders ensure that pupils develop respect for people different from themselves. The school fosters an inclusive community in which pupils are valued as individuals.
10. Staff apply the behaviour policy with compassion, and pupils are typically kind and well behaved. Leaders monitor incidents to identify trends. Anti-bullying arrangements are effective. Staff are vigilant, pupils know how to report concerns, and incidents are investigated, with those involved supported throughout.
11. Leaders promote emotional wellbeing through a coherent range of systems. Regular emotional check-ins enable staff to identify concerns quickly, and a specialist team provides accessible support. Pupils feel a genuine sense of belonging because staff know and care for them.

12. Leaders ensure that health and safety arrangements are effective and that the premises are well maintained.
13. Leaders prepare pupils effectively for life in British society. Pupils engage with democracy, civil and criminal law, and the role of public services. PSHE and the wider curriculum provide regular, structured opportunities to discuss moral, ethical and social issues with rigour and empathy.
14. Careers education is coherent and individualised from Year 7, supporting pupils in considering a wide range of pathways, including university and apprenticeships.

## 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 the teaching of personal, social, health and economic education is consistent so that all pupils remain engaged in these lessons and have the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding.

### Material change request

15. Inspectors considered the school's request to change the details of its registration, including increasing its capacity from 820 to 840 and its age range from 3 to 18 to 3 to 19.

- Leaders have given careful and specific consideration to the safeguarding implications of admitting additional pupils. The safeguarding team has sufficient capacity to effectively support the welfare of additional students. Leaders envisage the majority will join the sixth form. Therefore, an additional member of the team will be trained to increase the capacity in this phase of the school.
- The health and safety arrangements currently in place are appropriate for the proposed increase in capacity. The systems for identifying and managing risk, overseeing the safety of the site and responding to near misses and concerns are well established. No substantial changes to health and safety infrastructure or oversight are required.
- Leaders have considered the implications of an increased number of pupils for fire safety and evacuation. Existing fire arrangements, procedures and the capacity of evacuation routes are appropriate for the proposed change
- Leaders have considered the supervision implications of the proposed increase in capacity. Staffing levels, duty arrangements and registration systems have the capacity to accommodate the additional pupils without compromising the quality of supervision.
- Leaders and governors have given specific consideration to the risks associated with the proposed material change. In relation to the increase in capacity, leaders are satisfied that the school's existing

risk assessment framework, which is well embedded and subject to thorough and regular scrutiny, is appropriate for accommodating additional pupils.

- Leaders have assessed potential risks of extending the age range of the school from 3 to 18 to 3 to 19. These include risks arising from shared physical spaces so that older pupils will not have access to shared washing or changing facilities used by younger pupils.
- Existing staff have the qualifications, training and experience required to work with the full age range that the change would bring, including the capacity to support appropriately a greater number of pupils within the school community.
- The site and its facilities, including shared spaces such as the dining and assembly hall, and the sixth-form centre are appropriate for the proposed change. Teaching rooms have sufficient space to accommodate additional pupils.
- Governors and leaders have considered the potential impact of the proposed material change and appropriate measures are in place.

16. It is recommended that the requested material change be approved.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

17. Governors provide regular and systematic oversight of leaders' work. They draw on health and safety reports, achievement data and meetings with pupils and staff, ensuring that leaders and managers have the skills to actively promote pupils' wellbeing. Governors ensure that leaders are held to account, that all Standards are consistently met, and that the school's aims and ethos are visible in daily practice.
18. Leaders possess the skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles and carry out their responsibilities effectively. Decision-making is informed by clear evidence and reflects a compassionate and consistent commitment to pupils' wellbeing. Staff prioritise knowing each child well, enabling pupils to feel a sense of belonging, and link this directly to the school's aim of nurturing individual talent.
19. Leaders use parents' and pupils' views to devise an accessibility plan that fulfils the school's duties to adapt the curriculum, facilities and information sharing under the Equality Act 2010. In response to these views, leaders have reduced the levels of resonant sound in some rooms, and trained all staff to recognise unconscious bias.
20. A culture of self-evaluation and development is embedded across all phases. Leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness across all aspects of the pupils' experience, including educational progress, pupils' happiness, and the outcomes of curriculum decisions, and act on what they find. For example, in response to feedback about the transition to Year 7, staff now plan additional familiarisation activities with altered staff deployment to make the transition to senior school smoother.
21. Leaders manage risk effectively, anticipating potential challenges and implementing appropriate mitigations. They also identify and act on risks that are harder to spot, including those relating to emotional harm, taking swift and effective action. Governors and leaders regularly review the rationale and outcomes of teaching English, mathematics and science by gender in Years 7 to 9, ensuring the policy is implemented effectively, and its impact remains positive and non-discriminatory.
22. In the early years, regular supervision meetings and subsequent professional development planning ensure that staff are appropriately trained to meet the individual developmental needs of the children. Leaders review the effectiveness of their provision and make appropriate changes as a result. This includes providing phonics training for staff so that they can consistently implement a new phonics scheme and improve the coherence of children's early reading experience.
23. Leaders ensure that policies comply with relevant legislation. Policies are implemented effectively and understood by staff and pupils. Appropriate information is made available to parents and others through published policies, including those relating to safeguarding, anti-bullying and the curriculum, as well as through regular communication. Leaders inform the local authority when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition points and submit the required information for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
24. The published complaints policy meets statutory requirements. Leaders follow the timescales and stages of their complaints policy and ensure that there are informal and formal processes in place.

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

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

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

26. Leaders ensure the curriculum is broad, balanced and appropriate to pupils' ages and aptitudes, covering all required areas, including linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, and aesthetic and creative. Leaders incorporate opportunities for pupils to share their views to review and adapt curriculum planning so that it meets their needs, regardless of age or developmental stage. Choices at GCSE or A level include product design, photography and psychology, and pupils study their first-choice subjects due to the leaders' decision not to group subjects in option blocks. Leaders ensure that the curriculum does not discriminate and actively promotes British values.
27. Leaders ensure that the teaching and learning strategy of collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity is embedded in schemes of work and lesson plans. Leaders review curriculum planning and respond accordingly, such as successfully enhancing problem-solving in mathematics to increase pupils' understanding.
28. In the early years, staff implement an expertly sequenced curriculum that is ambitious and meets children's needs. It focuses on personal, social and emotional development, physical development, and communication and language. Staff plan and teach these areas across well-resourced indoor and outdoor environments that give children a rich learning experience. Children immerse themselves in activities that capture their interest and sustain their concentration. Early literacy develops through a phonics programme so that children learn to recognise and use sounds and apply this knowledge to write sentences independently. Staff use regular and accurate assessments to plan next steps, adapting activities and routines to support each child's emerging needs and capabilities. As a result, children make good progress and are well prepared for their next steps.
29. Staff have secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. They explain new ideas precisely, model vocabulary and use a range of methods including collaborative work, practical activity and questioning that promotes deeper thinking. Lesson content builds on prior learning. Teachers manage class time and behaviour well. Resources are used effectively to support learning, for example, the use of personal devices in the senior school enables pupils to access lesson content quickly. Feedback to pupils is regular and constructive, with lesson time set aside for them to respond. As a result, they engage in deepening learning and are actively involved in enhancing their progress.
30. Leaders implement assessment practices that are systematic, regular and clearly understood by pupils. Leaders liaise with teachers, using assessment data to set targets, plan additional support for individuals and groups, and adjust schemes of work, so that pupils are appropriately challenged. As a result, pupils make good progress.
31. Leaders have a clear oversight of teaching and learning through implementing a systematic quality assurance cycle of observing teaching, meeting to discuss pupils' progress, and scrutinising work.
32. Pupils who have SEND are identified on entry or through classroom observation as their needs emerge. Teachers, supported by the enhanced learning department, implement personalised strategies, including in-lesson support, and the use of visual aids and alternative recording methods. Individual and small-group sessions include additional support for dyslexia and for social, emotional,

and mental health needs. Leaders provide continuing professional development to staff, for example, training on adapting questioning strategies to support pupils who have anxiety.

33. Adults support pupils who speak EAL through structured vocabulary development. Teachers use visual aids, word lists and adapted resources, such as versions of stories with less complex language for children in the early years. Individual and small-group sessions support the development of vocabulary for upcoming lessons, enabling pupils who speak EAL to engage more fully with the curriculum.
34. Leaders provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities to enrich pupils' development. The school responds positively to pupils' requests for new clubs, such as the recently established Formula One club, and an inclusive sport-for-all ethos encourages pupils to participate. Young Enterprise develops problem-solving, communication, empathy and financial skills. In performing arts, ensembles and choirs allow pupils to perform in the local community, building self-esteem and confidence through collaboration and public performance.

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

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

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

36. Teachers are consistently interested in the pupils as individuals and establish warm and positive relationships. As a result, pupils feel a sense of belonging and show respect for each other and for adults throughout the school.
37. Leaders promote pupils' spiritual awareness through assemblies, mindfulness sessions and tutor-led activities that encourage personal reflection and an awareness of the world beyond the school. Moral development takes place in PSHE lessons, assemblies, form periods and subject lessons, where challenging topics such as moral decisions faced by wartime leaders and euthanasia are discussed. During these times, pupils make sensitive contributions and reflect on the complexity of dilemmas.
38. The PSHE curriculum is well planned, with age-appropriate and sequenced content. Pupils learn about topics including healthy eating and nutrition, how to perform first aid and how to manage the stress of examinations. Teaching in PSHE lessons is typically effective; however, this is not always the case. In some lessons, teachers do not ensure that pupils remain engaged which results in some pupils not making as much progress as they could.
39. The RSE curriculum is detailed and well planned, with clear sequencing to promote development of pupils' knowledge and understanding. Important topics are revisited annually to ensure understanding is firmly established. Parents and pupils are kept well informed of forthcoming content. Leaders review and refine curriculum content for RSE, such as recently increasing provision on coercive control and toxic masculinity. This ensures that pupils receive up-to-date guidance.
40. The physical education (PE) curriculum is broad and inclusive. Children in the early years develop balancing, climbing and throwing skills. PE and sports lessons develop an understanding of the role of activity in good health, as well as knowledge of gameplay and technical skills. Staff plan a wide variety of team and individual sports that build pupils' physical skills. Adventure days provide pupils with experiences that build self-confidence and teamwork.
41. Leaders promote pupils' emotional wellbeing effectively. PSHE lessons teach pupils to identify signs of stress and to develop coping strategies. Pupils carry out regular emotional check-ins via online apps, enabling staff to identify concerns and respond quickly. A specialist team and designated space provide a calm, accessible area where pupils can seek support independently.
42. Staff consistently apply the behaviour policy with compassion to meet individuals' needs so that pupils are typically kind and behave well. Leaders monitor incidents to identify potential trends and adapt curriculum plans and assemblies accordingly.
43. Leaders ensure that anti-bullying arrangements are effective. Staff are vigilant and pupils are taught to spot and report potential concerns by accessing personal tutors, heads of year, or reporting via online systems. Adults thoroughly investigate incidents with the needs of those involved at the centre of decision-making. Leaders support pupils until the matter has been fully resolved.

44. Health and safety arrangements are effective. The premises and facilities are well maintained, with all required statutory checks up to date, including Legionella control and swimming pool maintenance. Fire alarms and equipment are appropriately maintained, and pupils participate in regular evacuation drills. Staff supervise pupils appropriately.
45. Leaders oversee pupils' attendance, follow up on unexplained absences, and support families if attendance falls below thresholds. Targeted action by staff for pupils with lower-than-expected attendance has resulted in improvement across recent terms. Admission and attendance information is recorded appropriately.
46. First aid is administered promptly. The medical room has appropriate facilities. Suitably trained staff store and administer medication and follow protocols for specific conditions. An appropriate number of staff hold first aid qualifications, including paediatric first aid, and take first aid kits to off-site activities.
47. In the early years, activities promote children's personal, emotional and physical development effectively. Staff use compassionate and nurturing strategies to support children in recognising and regulating their emotions. They intervene sensitively to foster positive peer relationships. Appropriate supervision ratios, consistent routines, daily risk checks and a clear behaviour policy create a calm environment.
48. Leaders provide suitable leadership roles for pupils, including house captains, school councillors and head pupil teams, so that pupils have meaningful opportunities for representation and responsibility. Greater responsibility and freedom are extended to sixth-form pupils as a deliberate policy and sixth-form pupils respond by raising their conduct and commitment to meet these expectations.

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

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

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

50. Leaders actively promote British values across the curriculum and through wider school life. Pupils engage directly with democracy through a school council whose representatives bring pupils' views to leaders, with outcomes communicated back to form groups. In politics lessons, pupils engage with how the United Kingdom's democratic institutions function. Through PSHE, they learn about civil and criminal law in England and the role of public services. For example, in history, pupils take on prosecution and defence roles to consider whether the actions of King Charles I justified his execution, thereby developing an analytical understanding of the rule of law through inquiry. In assemblies, tutor time, and PSHE, pupils consider how empathy and mutual respect are possible across diverse groups, and, as a result, they show respect for people different from themselves. Throughout lessons about political themes, leaders ensure that pupils hear about a balanced presentation of different views.
51. Leaders develop pupils' social and cultural knowledge to reflect the school's aims and ethos. In religious education, planning builds pupils' understanding of world religions through linking learning to their lived experiences. Leaders review curriculum resources to ensure a more balanced representation of history, contributing to pupils' sense of belonging. Leaders ensure that pupils developing mutual respect for people different from themselves is a consistent feature of school life. This is supplemented by clubs that represent different groups in the school, for example the pride club.
52. Leaders prepare pupils effectively for life in British society. The curriculum gives pupils regular opportunities to discuss moral and ethical issues in a structured way. In English, persuasive writing tasks on animal welfare require pupils to consider both sides of an argument, developing the capacity to engage with ethical questions with rigour and empathy. Leaders actively promote clear principles of right and wrong. Pupils are taught to stand up for their peers, challenge discrimination and review their own actions.
53. Leaders provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to contribute to the local area and wider society. Charitable and community engagement is extensive and carefully structured, with pupils choosing the causes they support through democratic processes within houses and pupil councils, emphasising understanding of impact rather than transactional fundraising. Activities include care home visits, foodbank support, and bike repair for charity, alongside empathy-building projects such as purchasing gifts for children's hospices. Pupils take part in enrichment activities that promote teamwork and social responsibility, including Model United Nations, peer mentoring, and sports-based community projects.
54. Leaders provide well-planned careers education that is coherent and individualised. Provision from Year 7 onwards is embedded within the curriculum and PSHE. One-to-one guidance supports pupils in considering a wide range of future pathways, including apprenticeships, creative industries and university entry.
55. Economic understanding begins early so that children in the early years develop financial concepts, including knowledge of coin values, through role play in a class florist shop. In PSHE, pupils learn about debt, savings and student finance across year groups, and Young Enterprise participants

develop practical cashflow planning and budgeting skills, identifying this learning as directly applicable to managing their own finances. Enterprise-focused projects in music, including branding and merchandising, embed economic understanding further across the curriculum.

56. In the early years, children develop social awareness through structured play and guided interactions. Staff support children in sharing, taking turns, and negotiating. They model respectful behaviour and awareness of others' feelings. As a result, children develop listening skills and early conflict-resolution abilities.

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

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

## Safeguarding

58. Leaders place pupils' welfare at the centre of all decision-making so that a clear safeguarding culture is evident throughout the school. Adults understand that keeping pupils safe is a collective responsibility. This understanding shapes how staff engage with pupils and respond to concerns.
59. Those with designated safeguarding responsibilities have appropriate training and experience for their roles. Safeguarding leaders work with the independence and authority needed to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Information is shared promptly across the team, records are detailed and well organised and responses to concerns are timely.
60. All staff complete safeguarding induction before working with pupils, which covers the school's reporting procedures and how to recognise signs of concern. Training is updated regularly throughout the year and addresses current themes, including online safety, child-on-child harm and the potential influence of extremist material. Staff with specialist responsibilities, such as those working in early years or with individual musicians, receive additional training that is tailored to their specific context. As a result, staff across the school recognise concerns and follow procedures with confidence.
61. Leaders monitor patterns in pupils' behaviour, attendance and emotional wellbeing so that emerging concerns are identified early. This includes attention to risks that are harder to detect, such as concerns arising from pupils' lives outside school. Where escalation is needed, leaders work effectively with external safeguarding partners and specialist agencies to ensure pupils receive the right support in a timely way.
62. Staff understand the arrangements for managing concerns about adults' conduct. Leaders record all relevant information and take appropriate action. They ensure that whistleblowing procedures are accessible and trusted.
63. Leaders implement thorough recruitment procedures, with all required pre-employment checks completed before any adult, including governors, visiting professionals and volunteers, begins working with pupils. These checks are accurately recorded on the single central record of appointments.
64. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. The curriculum covers topics such as recognising unsafe situations, understanding the risks associated with online activity, including grooming and harmful content, and knowing how to seek help from trusted adults.
65. Internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place and reviewed regularly for effectiveness. This ensures that pupils do not access unsuitable material when using the internet at school.
66. Governors maintain thorough oversight of safeguarding arrangements, review their effectiveness at regular intervals and ensure that leaders take necessary actions to promote pupils' welfare.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Clifton High School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	801/6001
<b>Registered charity number</b>	311736
<b>Address</b>	Clifton High School College Road Clifton Bristol BS8 3JD
<b>Phone number</b>	0117 973 0201
<b>Email address</b>	schooloffice@cliftonhigh.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.cliftonhigh.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Clifton High School
<b>Chair</b>	Dr Peter Bodkin
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Will Phelan
<b>Age range</b>	3 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	814
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	6 to 8 June 2023

## Information about the school

68. Clifton High School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged 3 to 18, located in Clifton, Bristol. The school comprises: an early years setting, for pupils aged 3 to 5 years; an infant department, for pupils aged 5 to 7 years; a junior department, for pupils aged 7 to 11 years; a senior department, for pupils aged 11 to 16 years; and a sixth form for pupils aged 16 to 18. The school is a registered charity, with the trustees acting as governors. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors was appointed in January 2026, and the headteacher took up his role in September 2024.
69. The school operates a curriculum model in which male and female pupils in Years 7 to 9 are taught separately in English, mathematics and science.
70. There are 60 children in the early years, comprising two Nursery and two Reception classes.
71. The school has identified 230 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
72. The school has identified English as an additional language for 156 pupils.
73. The school states its aim is to realise individual brilliance in each pupil, ensuring they enjoy learning, recognise the worth of a holistic education within a supportive and engaging community, and feel a sense of belonging, enabling ambition both academically and personally. It intends to support this through the four key values of curiosity, empathy, love and direction, and ensure every individual is valued for the person they are and support them in the direction that they have chosen.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

28 to 30 April 2026

74. A team of seven inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

75. 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.

76. 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)**.

**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

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

For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)