

# School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

## **Wells Cathedral School**

15 The Liberty

Wells

BA5 2ST

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 ensure that all required Standards, including the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (NMS) and requirements in the early years, are met.
2. Music provision within the school includes a high-quality Cathedral chorister programme for male and female pupils and a specialist music school for around a third of pupils. Together, these provide a highly effective setting where pupils benefit from a rich, coherent and ambitious music curriculum. Their learning is supported by expert tuition from specialist practitioners, extensive ensemble and chamber music programmes, and frequent opportunities to perform to 'pre-professional' standards.
3. This specialist conservatoire-style model of music provision immerses pupils who study music in a culture of high aspiration and high artistic standards, enabling many to progress to leading conservatoires, specialist music colleges and specialist university courses.
4. The school's close partnership with Wells Cathedral provides an inspiring and musically enriched environment. Choristers take part in high-quality liturgical and concert performances, including on the many occasions that the school community attends services and celebrations at the Cathedral. This develops their deep musical understanding, technical precision and rich appreciation of the spiritual purpose of their music-making.
5. A significant strength of the school is the way in which leaders integrate high-performing choristers and musicians fully into school life, and in doing so, make a substantial contribution to the school's ethos, the wider curriculum and the overall experience of pupils from nursery through to sixth form. Those who do not study music as a specialism gain considerably from working alongside these musicians during lessons and when taking part in the creative arts, including the school's very wide range of productions. Through these experiences, pupils encounter high expectations, disciplined rehearsal processes and outstanding performances, which raise aspirations and enhance the intellectual, spiritual, personal, social and emotional development of all groups of pupils.
6. The curriculum is carefully planned in the early years and throughout the school. It is broad, well-balanced and ambitious. A suitable and detailed framework for assessment is in place. GCSE and A-level results are consistently above national averages, particularly in the higher grades. Pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), typically make good progress from their starting points. However, teaching does not consistently include a range of appropriate strategies to meet the learning, emotional and behavioural needs of pupils who have SEND as effectively as possible. Co-curricular provision is extensive, enhancing pupils' wider development and enriching their learning experience.
7. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) benefit from early identification of their language needs and structured support so that they make good progress.
8. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculums are well structured and rigorously planned. Choristers and specialist musicians receive tailored pastoral support that balances their musical, academic and wellbeing needs. Spiritual understanding and self-knowledge are nurtured throughout the school. Appropriate supervision is in place, including for boarding provision. Pupils are supported effectively in developing a clear understanding of bullying and why it is unacceptable. They are encouraged to

take responsibility for their actions. Older pupils act as positive role models by showing younger pupils how to behave thoughtfully and how to interact with others in a mature and responsible way.

9. The attendance register is suitably maintained overall. However, when the inspection commenced, there were some instances of inaccurate use of codes to record lateness. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.
10. Appropriate health and safety procedures, including fire safety checks and evacuation drills, are carried out regularly and diligently. Typically, the premises are maintained to a high standard. However, when the inspection commenced, not all sources of drinking water were labelled as such and a small kitchen, used by boarders and an after-school club, required cleaning. Leaders rectified these issues during the inspection.
11. Pupils are well equipped for life in modern British society. From the early years, they develop confident oracy skills that enable them to listen carefully and communicate with assurance. Across the school, pupil leaders take on a wide range of responsibilities that contribute positively to the school community, the local area and the wider world. Careers education and a focus on economic understanding equip pupils with the knowledge, practical skills and high aspirations needed to manage their personal affairs, progress to further study and make informed choices about the next stages of their lives.
12. The school maintains an effective safeguarding culture across all areas, including boarding and the early years. The safeguarding team responds quickly to concerns and works closely with external agencies. Staff receive comprehensive training, understand whistleblowing and low-level concern procedures, and record concerns consistently and accurately using the school's electronic system. All safer recruitment checks are completed and recorded accurately on the single central record of appointments (SCR).

## 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 includes a range of appropriate strategies to meet the learning, emotional and behavioural needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- strengthen oversight of the suitability of the premises and accommodation to ensure that it is maintained consistently
- ensure the consistent use of required codes to record lateness in the attendance register.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. The governing body is structured to include representatives of the chapter of Wells Cathedral and a range of appointed lay governors. The board operates through a series of committees, including, academic, pastoral and recreational and development, which report back to the full governing body. Leaders and governors provide suitable oversight of the school by scrutinising detailed reports from leaders and staff, conducting regular meetings with leaders, analysing data relating to pupils' progress and attainment, visiting lessons and school activities, conducting surveys and carrying out regular visits during which they speak with staff, pupils and parents. This oversight ensures that leaders use their skills and knowledge to promote pupils' wellbeing and fulfil their duties to ensure that the Standards are met.
14. The school has recently undergone a period of considerable change and restructuring in response to external circumstances. Throughout this process, governors and leaders have maintained a clear and sustained vision for how to promote the school's aims and ethos, which places the wellbeing of pupils at the centre of school life.
15. Governors and leaders are in the very early stages of developing and implementing a revised strategic plan and school improvement priorities in order to establish the foundations for the future development of the school. Policies are reviewed regularly by leaders and updated in line with statutory requirements. These are well understood by staff and typically implemented consistently.
16. In the early years, leaders ensure that policies and routines are applied consistently, in line with the statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (EYFS), and that staff receive appropriate training to develop their practice. Children throughout the setting benefit from a nurturing, language-rich environment that promotes their confidence, independence, early communication skills and positive attitudes to learning.
17. Boarding leaders ensure that all relevant policies are applied consistently and that boarders and their families receive up-to-date information. In particular, they demonstrate a supportive understanding of the needs of the choristers and specialist musicians. For example, they make appropriate allowances for early morning rehearsals, performance schedules and periods of intensive musical preparation, ensuring that boarders have rest, recreation time and pastoral support. As a result, boarders experience a caring and well-organised environment that promotes their wellbeing, confidence and growing independence.
18. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, including safeguarding partners, to ensure that pupils' needs are identified and supported appropriately. They maintain appropriate communication with the local authority regarding statutory reviews and the allocation of funding for pupils who have education, health and care plans (EHC plans).
19. The school has an appropriate accessibility plan in place, which includes adjustments to information, the curriculum and, where possible, the physical environment. The school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.
20. Governors evaluate risk strategically and with care, considering the likelihood of any unintended consequences. Leaders ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place, including for safeguarding. They identify the level of specific risk, outline clear control measures and check that

staff understand and implement these. Leaders review risk assessments regularly, including after incidents or changes in provision, so that arrangements remain responsive to emerging needs.

21. Parents have access to a range of information through the school's website and detailed newsletters. All the required policies and information are published on the school's website. Parents are regularly informed about their child's progress and attainment through written reports, grade cards and in-person and online consultations with staff. Leaders provide the local authority with timely information regarding any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition times.
22. The school has a suitable complaints policy which is implemented in line with statutory requirements. Leaders respond appropriately to any concerns raised by parents and pupils. The number of formal complaints received for the previous year is made available as required. Records are kept appropriately, including those relating to any action taken and the outcomes of the complaint.

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

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

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

24. The curriculum covers all required areas of learning, including English, mathematics, science, technology, humanities and the performing and creative arts. Music is deeply embedded in this broad framework and in daily life.
25. Choristers from the school are typically aged 7 to 14 years. They rehearse four days per week and sing in regular services, as well as at major liturgical events, in concerts and on special occasions. Their programme includes progressive vocal training, opportunities to perform to a professional standard and participation in broadcasts, recordings and tours. This demanding and enriching schedule develops pupils' confidence and musical discipline, enabling them to acquire advanced musical knowledge and work collaboratively to meet high expectations for performance.
26. The specialist music school provides for pupils with high musical ability. The music curriculum is broad and well-structured, encompassing singing, rhythm, composition, music technology and cross-disciplinary creative work. This high-quality provision enables pupils to develop secure and advanced musical skills and fosters their creativity.
27. A large number of pupils are supported to successfully take Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and Trinity College London examinations across a wide range of instruments, including violin, cello, harp, flute, trumpet, organ and piano, as well as singing. Pupils participate in a wide variety of productions, from *West Side Story* to *Shakespeare in Love*. Many also achieve success in London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) examinations, further enriching their performance skills.
28. Leaders ensure that there is a consistent focus on the development of linguistic and mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding, which supports pupils' learning across the curriculum. Subject leaders demonstrate expertise in their areas. As well as ensuring that planning takes account of curriculum requirements, examination demands and pupils' prior attainment, leaders incorporate additional challenge and creativity, including through a substantial programme of annual trips. For example, a geography visit to Iceland enables pupils to observe volcanic landscapes, geothermal activity and glacial features first-hand, and a drama trip to Greece allows pupils to explore ancient theatres, engage with classical texts in their historical context and gain insight into the cultural origins of Western drama. Regular educational visits to Wells Cathedral provide pupils with rich cross-curricular learning opportunities that particularly broaden and deepen their understanding of music, history, sacred geometry, religious education and art.
29. Pupils typically study nine GCSEs, following a core programme of English language and literature, mathematics, combined or single sciences, a modern foreign language and a short course in religion, philosophy and ethics, alongside three optional subjects. In addition, pupils study a short course in religion, philosophy and ethics. In the sixth form, pupils usually begin with three A levels, with the possibility of studying four, and the option to complete an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). Specialist musicians may follow a reduced GCSE or A-level load where appropriate, enabling them to effectively balance their academic commitments with the demands of their specialist training.
30. The school has a comprehensive framework for assessment across all stages and subjects. Most teachers provide effective feedback that helps pupils to understand what they have achieved and what they need to do next. At the end of the prep school and by the time they leave, all groups of

pupils make good progress from their starting points. GCSE and A-level results are consistently well above national averages, particularly in the higher grades, and most pupils progress to their first choice of conservatoire or university.

31. In the early years, children learn effectively in a child-led environment underpinned by a creative curriculum that is structured around the seven areas of learning, where their interests, questions and ideas guide the direction of activities. Early literacy and numeracy are woven seamlessly into daily routines, such as shared reading, storytelling, mark-making, counting games and practical problem-solving. Adults nurture children's curiosity through purposeful exploration, play and investigation, supported by warm, high-quality interactions. This approach is exemplified during 'welly Wednesdays', when children take part in outdoor activities that build practical skills, for example, exploring camouflage, cooking safely at a fire pit and recording their heart rate data after exercise.
32. The statutory two-year progress check is used effectively to identify any areas where children require additional support. Assessment is aligned with the early learning goals, with most children meeting expected standards by the end of the Reception year. Additional school-based assessments indicate that many go beyond these expectations and are well prepared for the next stage of their learning.
33. The transition through Years 1 and 2 and into the prep school is carefully planned. Pupils are taught by form teachers alongside subject specialists. The prep school curriculum provides daily English and mathematics alongside specialist teaching in art, drama, music and sport. Humanities and science are taught through topic-based learning in Years 3 and 4, moving to discrete subject teaching in Years 5 and 6. Pupils benefit from additional enrichment opportunities, including music technology, outdoor learning and the teaching of French from Year 2. The school's 'learning powers' of curiosity, resilience, motivation, detective-skills, resourcefulness and risk-taking, promote independence and a love of learning. Close links with the senior school, supported by carefully planned transition arrangements, ensure continuity and enable pupils to access shared resources and specialist expertise.
34. Leaders of provision for pupils who have SEND are based across the pre-prep and prep and senior sections of the school. Recent restructuring and staffing changes have begun to create greater coherence and consistency in the co-ordination of SEND provision throughout the school. A suitable register of pupils who have SEND is maintained, including in relation to intakes in Years 7 and 9. Details of how individual needs should be met are provided through detailed individual learning plans (ILPs). The majority of teaching takes these plans into account, with the implementation of effective strategies to support behaviour and learning. These include clear routines, predictable expectations, movement breaks, the use of calm, low-key prompts, the structuring of tasks into manageable steps, modelling answers, pre-teaching key vocabulary, providing visual prompts and offering structured reference materials, such as word banks or summary sheets. However, such practice is not embedded across all subjects and year groups. As a result, pupils who have SEND do not consistently benefit from the full range of academic and behavioural strategies needed to support their learning and progress effectively.
35. The language competency of pupils who speak EAL is assessed appropriately using nationally recognised benchmarks, enabling leaders to identify needs accurately from the point of registration. Provision is overseen by suitably qualified staff who monitor progress and ensure that pupils benefit from structured approaches to language development. These include, when required, the use of

visual supports, simplified and sequenced information, and clearly modelled vocabulary and grammatical structures.

36. The co-curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of opportunities that enable them to develop knowledge, skills and relationships beyond the classroom. Activities such as the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE), climbing, kayaking, engineering and mindfulness broaden pupils' experiences and promote teamwork and personal confidence. Boarders benefit from additional access to evening and weekend activities, including inter-house events, outdoor pursuits, use of the school's sports and music facilities, trips, shared meals and social activities within the boarding houses.

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

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

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

38. The PSHE curriculum, which incorporates appropriate and effective RSE, is carefully structured, planned rigorously and well supported with high-quality resources. Staff are trained comprehensively. They receive ongoing guidance from school leaders so that provision is consistent and effective.
39. In the early years and prep school, content is carefully sequenced to include age-appropriate topics such as friendships, families, respect and kindness. It is taught as a core subject by teachers, reinforced through the wider curriculum and enriched by assemblies and visiting speakers. In the senior school, specialist RSE teachers guide pupils through detailed consideration of key areas. Pupils are given the opportunity to ask questions and to explore sensitive topics, including sexual health, contraception, pornography, healthy relationships, consent, boundaries and managing peer influence.
40. Pupils' progress in PSHE and RSE is evaluated effectively through a combination of observations, pupil discussions, assessed tasks and end-of-year reviews. Careful analysis of this information informs planning and helps staff to address any gaps or misconceptions.
41. Mental wellbeing is well supported across the school by the pastoral team, which includes staff trained in mental health first aid, and emotional literacy support assistants. The 'nest', for pre-prep pupils, the 'treehouse' for prep pupils and the 'wellbeing hub', for senior pupils, provide supportive spaces where pupils are listened to and cared for and can access counselling services. Choristers and specialist musicians receive carefully structured support that prioritises their wellbeing alongside their musical development. Their schedules are thoughtfully managed to ensure that rehearsal and performance commitments remain balanced with rest, pastoral care and academic study.
42. Spiritual understanding and the development of self-knowledge are nurtured deeply throughout the school. Pupils benefit from daily opportunities to reflect, question and explore meaning within the inspiring Cathedral setting. Regular services, moments of quiet contemplation and participation in the Cathedral's musical and liturgical life encourage pupils to consider their own beliefs and values, as well as those of others. Across the curriculum, teachers create meaningful opportunities for pupils to explore profound questions, such as what it means to live a good life or how people find purpose. Religious education, philosophy and ethics, and assemblies further deepen pupils' understanding of world faiths, helping them to appreciate the significance of spirituality across diverse cultural contexts.
43. In the early years, children's physical development is promoted through well-established routines. Staff ensure that children's needs for nutritious eating, regular rest and appropriate sleep are consistently met in line with statutory requirements. Daily opportunities for active play, supported by a wide range of carefully selected equipment, and regular outdoor exploration greatly enhance children's physical confidence and the development of their co-ordination and use of their senses.
44. Physical development is fostered effectively for older pupils and boarders through physical education (PE) lessons, competitive fixtures and an extensive programme of co-curricular sport. Pupils with a particular aptitude for sport are encouraged to extend their skills, with many achieving

success at regional and national level in disciplines such as water polo, hockey, football, rugby, netball, cricket, athletics and tennis.

45. Appropriate supervision is maintained at all times. Staffing ratios in the early years meet statutory requirements and carefully structured supervision arrangements are in place across the boarding provision to support pupils' safety and wellbeing, including at night.
46. The school's behaviour management and anti-bullying strategies are rooted within a culture of respect. Behaviour is monitored closely through detailed recording of both positive conduct and any concerns, enabling leaders to identify individual or wider patterns and provide timely support where needed. Consequences are applied fairly, taking into consideration pupils' age and individual circumstances. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their actions, apologise where appropriate and make positive choices moving forward. Older pupils act as positive role models, demonstrating politeness, kindness and respect towards younger pupils. Pupils respond well to the school's system of rewards, particularly those linked to the house system, and value recognition through praise, commendations and awards in assemblies. Pupils develop a mature understanding of what constitutes bullying and why it is unacceptable, particularly through tutor times, assemblies and PSHE lessons.
47. There are suitable facilities for the administration of first aid in the medical centre and across the school site, including in the early years and boarding areas. The medical centre is managed by registered nurses, and a suitable number of staff hold appropriate first aid qualifications, with early years staff trained in paediatric first aid. Medicines are stored securely and administered in accordance with school policy. Leaders maintain thorough records of accidents, first aid treatment and the administration of medicines, ensuring that procedures are followed consistently and effectively.
48. The admission register is suitably maintained, as are attendance registers, typically. The school is in the process of implementing a new system for registration. Currently the system centrally converts codes used by the school to those required by statutory guidance. Registration periods are clearly defined. However, at the start of the inspection, the recording of pupils who arrived late was not consistently accurate. Leaders rectified this before the end of the inspection. Leaders monitor attendance diligently, particularly taking into account the wide range of musical and other activities that pupils attend. Support is implemented without delay for any pupils whose levels of absence cause concern.
49. Leaders responsible for health and safety ensure that staff are well trained and that all required checks, including those related to fire safety, are completed and recorded accurately. Regular evacuation drills, supported by trained fire marshals, help pupils and staff to respond appropriately in the event of an emergency. Typically, the school premises are maintained to a high standard. However, when the inspection commenced, a small kitchen, used by boarders and an after-school club, required cleaning. In addition, not all sources of drinking water were labelled as such. Leaders rectified these issues before the end of the inspection.

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

### **50. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

51. British values of democracy, respect for all, individual liberty, and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs are promoted widely through PSHE, the curriculum and assemblies. These principles are reinforced continually through the school's core values of creativity, aspiration, responsibility and endeavour.
52. In the early years, children learn to share, take turns, listen to others and express their views confidently. As they move through the school, including within the boarding community, pupils learn about human rights, different forms of discrimination and prejudice, enabling them to recognise injustice, challenge inequality and contribute positively to a community that values respect and inclusion.
53. Pupils gain a mature understanding of democracy by exploring the function of Parliament, how elections work, the role of members of parliament, and how democratic practice varies across different countries. Opportunities such as participation in the school council and involvement in debates enable pupils to experience democratic processes firsthand. Teachers ensure that pupils engage with a balanced range of political viewpoints. They guide them to question information critically, check the reliability of sources, and identify 'fake news' and potential bias.
54. Through studying how laws are created, interpreted and applied, pupils develop an understanding of how legal frameworks are designed to protect everyone and that actions carry consequences. In PSHE and across subjects such as history, philosophy and ethics, pupils explore the workings of the judiciary and local and national government, considering moral questions and the ethical dimensions of decision-making. Consequently, pupils develop a mature understanding of justice and of their responsibilities as active citizens within the wider community.
55. Pupils are consistently encouraged to develop effective communication and social skills across all areas of school life, including during boarding, recreation times, lessons, activities, assemblies, performances and trips. They listen attentively and respectfully to the views of others, collaborating effectively in lessons, performances and co-curricular activities. As they progress through the school, pupils develop mature leadership qualities through a wide range of roles, including school prefects, music captains, house captains, sports captains, philanthropy captains and school council representatives.
56. Pupil school leaders inspire the school community to support a variety of charities, including participating in Save the Children walks and Red Nose Day. 'The Event' is the school's major annual charity initiative linked to its partnership work in Sierra Leone. Pupils and staff take part in a wide range of fundraising activities, with all proceeds supporting educational and community projects in Sierra Leone. This project plays a substantial role in nurturing pupils' compassion, global awareness and commitment to social responsibility.
57. Pupils build a secure understanding of economic concepts through PSHE and the wider curriculum. Younger children begin by learning about sharing resources, making choices and understanding the difference between wants and needs. In the prep school, pupils explore practical financial skills including budgeting, saving, spending wisely and recognising the value of money. Senior pupils deepen this knowledge through topics such as consumer rights and the role of key financial

institutions. Pupils who choose to study economics at A level explore aspects such as market behaviour, government intervention, global trade and economic policy. Pupils are well-equipped with the practical skills needed to manage money and to make informed economic choices.

58. Pupils receive clear guidance on suitable qualification pathways and higher education options, supported by a structured careers programme aligned with the nationally recognised Gatsby benchmarks. Careers events, visiting speakers and work experience help pupils to understand the skills needed for different professions. Pupils in the sixth form are well prepared for a range of pathways, including university, conservatoires, apprenticeships, gap years and employment through an enrichment programme that broadens their awareness of career possibilities. Pupils also receive tailored support with university applications, personal statements and interview technique.
59. Specialist musicians receive individual advice on conservatoire applications and audition preparation. Insights from graduate music assistants, talks from professionals in fields such as broadcasting and music therapy, and opportunities to perform with visiting musicians further expand their understanding of potential career routes.

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

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

## Safeguarding

61. There is a well-established culture of safeguarding throughout the school, including within the boarding houses, chorister programme and early years. Staff demonstrate a clear awareness of contextual safeguarding, including the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty that relates to the risks of radicalisation and extremism. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures are in line with statutory guidance and implemented consistently. Leaders ensure that safeguarding policies are reviewed at least annually and updated promptly to reflect any changes in statutory requirements.
62. The safeguarding team is appropriately trained and has the capacity to carry out its responsibilities effectively. Members of the team act promptly whenever a concern is raised, ensuring that pupils receive timely support, including early help where appropriate. The team works collaboratively, meeting regularly to review cases, share relevant information and ensure that all staff have a clear and consistent understanding of emerging issues. The team maintains effective partnerships with external agencies, including the local authority, children's services, health professionals, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and the police. Close links with the local safeguarding partnership ensure that thresholds are clearly understood and that referrals are made without delay. All concerns and referrals are recorded thoroughly, with clear notes outlining the issue, actions taken and the rationale behind decisions.
63. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding, pastoral care and behaviour work closely together. Regular meetings and ongoing professional dialogue enable them to share information appropriately, review emerging concerns and agree the most suitable actions, including referrals, targeted pastoral support and access to counselling, where needed, to support pupils' wellbeing. Early years leaders meet frequently with staff to review the specific needs of younger children, identify effective strategies and plan relevant professional development. This collaborative approach ensures that support is timely, consistent and tailored to children's individual needs.
64. Governors take an active role in evaluating safeguarding practice through annual reviews, discussions with staff and pupils, and scrutiny of the SCR and supporting documentation. They receive detailed reports outlining training completed, referrals made, and the pastoral support provided, including actions related to behaviour, bullying and mental health. Leaders and governors use this information carefully to evaluate how effectively the school meets safeguarding requirements and to identify priorities for further improvement.
65. From the early years onwards, pupils develop a comprehensive understanding of how to keep themselves physically and emotionally safe, including when using information and communication technology (ICT) and when online. Younger children take part in guided activities, stories and role-play that help them to identify trusted adults, recognise personal boundaries and rehearse safe responses in unfamiliar situations. As pupils progress through the school, PSHE lessons and tutor time enable them to explore feelings, boundaries and safe decision-making in greater depth, helping them to build the confidence to raise concerns, question unsafe behaviour and seek support when needed. They have a range of ways to communicate any worries or concerns they may have through the pastoral system, including through tutors, house staff, anonymous online reporting and worry boxes. Leaders ensure that there is a suitable independent person for boarders to contact, should they need to, and details of how to do this are clearly displayed. Staff take account of the information pupils share and use it sensitively to implement appropriate support.

66. Pupils up to the sixth form are not permitted to use mobile phones on site. This reduces risks linked to online activity, distraction and peer conflict. When issues arise relating to pupils not adhering to this policy and to online behaviour outside school, staff respond quickly, including by confiscating devices, providing guidance, involving parents and, where appropriate, working with external agencies.
67. Governors, leaders and staff receive comprehensive safeguarding training, including regular updates on statutory guidance. Induction for new staff is thorough and includes clear guidance on the school's safeguarding, behaviour and whistleblowing policies, the staff code of conduct and how to contact leaders with safeguarding responsibilities. The safeguarding team routinely checks staff knowledge through discussion, scenario-based questions and short quizzes, helping to ensure that procedures are well understood, and that staff are confident in using the school's electronic system to record any concerns promptly and accurately.
68. Staff have a clear understanding of the school's whistleblowing procedures and know the steps to take if they have concerns about an adult's conduct. They recognise the importance of identifying and reporting low-level concerns promptly and making self-referrals where appropriate. Low-level concerns are recorded in detail in a central log, with clear notes on actions taken, such as discussion, mentoring and training.
69. The school uses effective internet filtering and monitoring systems and responds swiftly to any attempts to access inappropriate material. Actions may include blocking content, reviewing individual usage and providing immediate guidance to the pupil concerned. These systems are reviewed regularly, and governors receive routine reports to support their oversight.
70. All required safer recruitment checks are completed and recorded accurately in an SCR of appointments. Appropriate supporting information is securely stored within individual staff files.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Wells Cathedral School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	933/6029
<b>Registered charity number</b>	310212
<b>Address</b>	Wells Cathedral School 15 The Liberty Wells Somerset BA5 2ST
<b>Phone number</b>	01749 834200
<b>Email address</b>	main-office@wells.cathedral.school
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://wells.cathedral.school">https://wells.cathedral.school</a>
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Governors of Wells Cathedral School
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Robert Powell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Alastair Tighe
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	688
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	183
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	25 to 27 April 2023

## Information about the school

72. Wells Cathedral School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school. The school is a charitable trust and limited company. It was originally founded in 909 AD to educate choristers. The school comprises: pre-prep, for children from Nursery to Year 2; prep for pupils from Year 3 to Year 6; and senior, for pupils from Year 7 to the upper sixth form. A choir school for the Cathedral choristers, a specialist music school and a specialist maths programme are incorporated into the provision. The governing body of ecclesiastical and lay members has proprietorial responsibility. The current chair took up his responsibilities in September 2025.
73. Boarding begins in Year 4, with around two-thirds of boarders coming from overseas. Most pupils board full time, although weekly and flexi-boarding options are also available. Boarding accommodation consists of seven boarding houses located on the main school campus and around the Cathedral Close. There are two houses for male pupils in the senior school, three houses for female pupils in the senior school, a mixed house for pupils in Years 4 to 8 and a mixed house for pupils in the upper sixth form.
74. The early years provision operates for fifty weeks of the year, from 8am to 5pm. It currently caters for 55 children in two Nursery classes and 12 children in one Reception class.
75. The school has identified 232 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Five pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
76. The school has identified English as an additional language for 99 pupils.
77. The school's motto, 'Esto Quod Es' (Be What You Are), underpins its core aim of enabling every pupil to become the best they can be. It seeks to sustain a culture where excellence inspires excellence, regardless of specific interests or talents. Through the provision of world-class specialist music and chorister education, it aims to inspire all pupils to nurture their varied talents within a vibrant, creative, spiritual and stimulating environment. The school is committed to preparing pupils to become responsible global citizens by embedding its 'CARE' values of creativity, aspiration, responsibility and endeavour throughout school life, promoting imagination, ambition, respect and a willingness to try new things and give their best.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

28 to 30 April 2026

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

79. 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.

80. 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**

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