

School inspection report

21 to 23 October 2025

Austin Friars

Etterby Scaur

Carlisle

Cumbria

CA3 9PB

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' oversight of the school does not ensure that it meets all of the Standards.
2. Not all safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders do not ensure that all staff receive regular and up-to-date safeguarding training. Leaders do not keep a suitable log of low-level concerns or review these as required by current statutory guidance.
3. Leaders do not ensure that the school's complaints process is implemented effectively. They do not implement a suitable three-stage process or adhere to published timescales. Leaders do not maintain a suitable log of formal complaints.
4. The school's website provides comprehensive information about policies and procedures to current parents and parents of prospective pupils. However, at the start of the inspection, not all required inspection reports were made available on the school's website. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.
5. Leaders promote the school's aims and ethos effectively. Leaders ensure that the school supports the academic and personal development of pupils so that they gain the qualifications and skills needed to proceed successfully to further education or employment.
6. Leaders manage potential risks and apply effective and systematic health and safety procedures. As a result, the premises are well maintained.
7. Leaders plan a suitable curriculum with consideration given to pupils' varied needs and interests. The range of subjects that pupils can study is suitably varied and recent additions to the curriculum have developed this.
8. Most lessons are well planned and taught so that pupils make typically good progress. Pupils exhibit fluent communication skills and are successful in national examinations. However, some teaching is not so successfully planned or managed, with the result that some pupils can lose focus and do not make as much progress in lessons as they could.
9. Effective programmes of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) contain suitable content and are taught in an age-appropriate way across all year groups.
10. The school provides pupils with suitable careers guidance which is particularly well established in the sixth form. However, careers guidance is not implemented consistently effectively for pupils in Years 7 to 11.
11. The safeguarding team responds to safeguarding concerns appropriately and in a timely fashion, including through liaison with external safeguarding agencies when required.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not 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 not met.

Areas for action

The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:

- demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school Standards are consistently met
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the independent school Standards are consistently met and
- actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils

so that:

- staff receive regular and up-to-date safeguarding training
- a suitable log of low-level concerns is maintained and reviewed as required by current statutory guidance
- the school's complaints process is implemented effectively through a suitable three-stage process and adherence to published timescales
- leaders maintain a suitable log of formal complaints.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that all inspection reports since January 2015 are consistently made available to parents on the school's website
- ensure that teaching is consistently well planned and managed to maintain pupils' focus and enable them to progress well

- ensure the consistently effective implementation of the careers guidance programme across Years 7 to 11.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. Governors do not ensure that leaders demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil all their duties and ensure that all the Standards are met, particularly those relating to safeguarding and the management of complaints. As a result, pupils' wellbeing is not always actively promoted.
13. Leaders and governors do not ensure that the school's complaints process is effectively implemented. They do not ensure that complaints are managed within published timescales or through an appropriate three-stage process. Leaders do not keep a suitable log of formal complaints.
14. Leaders evaluate the school's successes and areas for development. They regularly consult staff, pupils and parents and their views form part of clear development plans. These plans are consistently monitored and reported on by leaders to promote positive outcomes for pupils, such as improvements in academic attainment over the last two years. Subject leaders take a leading role in developing practice in teaching and learning to promote pupil's progress. They work effectively with their teams to implement initiatives such as changes to the curriculum.
15. Leaders are visible and approachable within the school. They promote the school's aims and ethos clearly and ensure that the school's Augustinian values of 'unity, truth and love' are understood by pupils, parents and staff.
16. Governors oversee the school through consideration of how effectively leaders and staff implement the school's policies and procedures. Governors with particular areas of responsibility provide leaders with challenge and support. The school's website provides comprehensive information about the school's policies and procedures for parents of current and prospective pupils. Parents receive regular reports about their own child's progress and learning. The school provides the local authority with the required information regarding the use of funds for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). However, when the inspection commenced, not all required inspection reports were available on the school's website. Leaders rectified this before the end of the inspection.
17. Leaders have effective oversight of risk management and mitigate risk carefully. Risk assessments for activities and trips take account of the needs of individual pupils and are checked by senior leaders. Staff implement the control measures identified in risk assessments effectively. Leaders regularly review risk assessments to ensure they remain suitable for purpose.
18. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders implement a suitable accessibility plan that identifies the actions taken to improve pupils' access to the premises and the curriculum, including through the introduction of new technologies to support pupils when appropriate.
19. Leaders foster effective partnerships with outside agencies to provide additional support for pupils' wellbeing.

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

20. Standards are not met consistently with regard to safeguarding and the management of complaints.

21. As a result, Standards relating to governance, leadership and management are not met.

22. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. Leaders organise the curriculum to meet pupils' needs effectively and to cover all the required areas of learning. They thoughtfully consider the diverse interests and aptitudes of pupils and modify the curriculum to take account of these, such as through the recent implementation of new GCSE courses in psychology and agriculture and the extension of sixth-form provision to include Cambridge Technical (CTEC) courses. These curriculum choices support pupils who are studying towards appropriate higher education or employment destinations. In the junior school, there is an increased focus on developing pupils' depth of learning, with a new mathematics curriculum designed to improve progress and rigour in mathematical learning.
24. Leaders in the early years provide opportunities for children to learn through play and exploration of the world around them, particularly the natural world. The early years curriculum is well planned to enable children to develop their understanding of number, space and shapes. Staff encourage children to communicate effectively and ask 'how' and 'why' questions about their learning across the curriculum and the wider world. The phonics programme enables children to make good progress in acquiring early reading and writing skills. A recent redesign of the curriculum to utilise an approach based on seasons and festivals has supported children's development by reflecting their interests and experiences.
25. Pupils, including children in the early years, typically make good progress at each stage of their education. At GCSE, results are consistently above the national average. Performance has been less consistent at post-16 level, but results were above the national average in 2025.
26. Teachers are knowledgeable in their subject areas. They use their expertise to ensure that pupils make progress through well-planned lessons and teaching methods that typically promote reflective learning and productive use of resources. For example, in sixth-form design and technology (DT) lessons, pupils use a wide range of techniques to meet design briefs and confidently discuss their design process, while in Year 8 mathematics lessons, pupils show confidence using fractions, presenting their answers to their class while explaining their thought processes. However, in some lessons teachers do not employ effective planning or time management, and as a result pupils lose focus and their progress is limited.
27. Teachers employ a range of resources to support pupils' learning, such as the outdoor environment in agriculture, science laboratories for practical work when appropriate, dramatised retellings in history and geographic information system software in geography. These different approaches typically foster pupils' focus and engagement and support pupils' overall good progress.
28. An effective framework to evaluate pupils' progress and learning is in place. School and subject leaders monitor assessment data regularly and quickly put in place support for pupils in need of extra help so that they achieve well. Teachers provide effective feedback which enables pupils to enhance their work and develop their thinking. In examination courses, regular self-evaluation against mark schemes helps pupils to have a firm understanding of the requirements of their courses and their next steps. Communication between home and school takes place effectively through reports and regular less formal means.
29. Leaders of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) support pupils through a range of strategies, including support in class and focused additional

support sessions outside of lesson time. The learning support department provides whole-school training for staff, enabling them to share strategies to support pupils who have particular types of SEND. Appropriate teaching strategies, including the effective deployment of teaching assistants, enable pupils who have SEND to make good progress.

30. Leaders provide pupils with an appropriate range of co-curricular activities which develop pupils' skills in areas such as sport, music, art and design. Pupils participate enthusiastically in activities such as school plays, the school music festival and design competitions.
31. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are provided with effective language support when required. Teachers make effective use of resources such as vocabulary lists and word banks, and the provision of subjects such as the IGCSE in English as a second language.

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

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

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

33. The PSHE programme is comprehensive and contains suitable content that is taught in an age-appropriate manner. Pupils learn about a range of topics including the dangers of different types of addiction, internet safety and coping with worries. In the junior school these lessons are enhanced with activities known as 'being me in my world', which include learning about how to be a school citizen and part of a class team.
34. The RSE programme is in line with current statutory guidance. It covers a range of suitable themes, including puberty, consent, the dangers of sexual harassment and exploitation, guarding against peer pressure and different types of healthy relationships. Teachers encourage pupils to ask questions and respond to them with helpful and accurate guidance. Leaders ensure parents are kept well informed and questions can be asked at regular parents' forums and events.
35. The varied programme of physical education (PE) includes both team and individual sports. Pupils are encouraged to develop skills across a range of sports such as rugby, hockey, cricket and netball. They also take part in the 'morning mile' in junior school and are able to take part in competitive fixtures in the senior school. The PE programme enhances pupils' understanding of the role that physical fitness plays in healthy living and provides them with opportunities to develop their mental resilience.
36. Behaviour management is effective. Leaders and staff model the school's Augustinian values, including mutual trust and respect, which are also threaded through the curriculum. These values are fostered through respectful and positive relationships with pupils. Poor behaviour is rare but is recorded and managed effectively when it occurs, including through the proportionate use of sanctions when appropriate. Leaders ensure that pupils know the school rules and understand the importance of keeping them. For example, the school's mobile phone policy is adhered to and courteous behaviour such as wiping tables and queuing sensibly are the norm around the school.
37. Leaders and staff develop pupils' understanding of the difference between unkindness and bullying and provide pupils with a range of ways to raise any concerns about bullying, such as talking to a teacher or using a worry box. Leaders maintain a suitable record of the rare incidents of bullying that arise. They support pupils affected by bullying and encourage them to resolve problems.
38. Leaders implement a systematic approach to health and safety. Health and safety policies and procedures are comprehensive and regularly reviewed, including those related to fire risk. Measures such as regular fire drills and fire risk assessments ensure that the school complies with fire regulations. The premises contain suitable facilities and are appropriately maintained, with a robust system of routine checks in place to ensure defects are swiftly identified. An effective system for logging and resolving defects discovered is in place.
39. Pupils are appropriately supervised and supported at breaktime, lunchtime and other unstructured times. This includes time spent in the dining hall, attending activities or playing football in the areas set aside for this. Suitable staff-to-child ratios are maintained in the early years.

40. Admission and attendance registers are appropriately maintained in line with current guidance. The school promptly informs the local authority if pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.
41. Appropriate first aid arrangements, including suitable medical facilities, ensure that pupils receive prompt, appropriate and caring treatment if they are ill or injured. Pupils' medical needs are known and managed through the use of care plans when appropriate. Staff receive first aid training which is appropriate to their needs and regularly updated. Staff working in the early years undertake paediatric first aid training with appropriate regularity.
42. Children below compulsory school age are encouraged to develop their independence through initiating their own creative activities and exploring appropriately in areas such as the woodland learning environment. Through well-run meal and snack times, children learn turn-taking skills and practice their fine motor skills by using cutlery. They learn how to care for their bodies by talking about oral hygiene and healthy food choices.

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

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

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

44. Leaders ensure that the curriculum and teaching support British values such as tolerance and respect. These are taught in PSHE lessons and assemblies and are visible in the respectful way pupils speak about others. Lessons include thoughtful debate about issues relating to inclusion, equality and diversity. For example, pupils consider historical and more modern views of the roles of men and women in society, the merits of egalitarianism in society and different understandings of global development. Outside of lessons, pupils' understanding is enhanced through visits from interesting and appropriate speakers. Assemblies and chapel services address social, cultural and human issues beyond the school community.
45. From the early years, children and pupils learn about a range of cultures and religions. This fosters an appreciation of diversity, as does pupils' consideration of different forms of prejudice and discrimination, and their effects. Religious and cultural festivals, including Diwali and Passover, are studied and celebrated. Trips to the Augustinian Youth Conference and opportunities such as the annual San Gimignano retreat encourage pupils' spiritual reflection.
46. Pupils in the sixth form develop their leadership skills and sense of responsibility towards others through roles such as form prefects or ambassadors for their subjects. Younger pupils respect prefects and benefit from spending time with them. Prefects act as examples to others when, for example, modelling how to complete tasks in DT, running form-time quizzes and visiting their allocated forms during residential trips.
47. Pupils learn about democracy and politics through lessons and the wider curriculum. In the junior school, pupils learn about democratic ideas such as voting and their responsibilities as citizens. Older pupils explore the role of the British Government and how this compares to other democracies. Pupils can observe election hustings and take part in school mock elections when general elections occur. Leaders are careful that any political information shared with pupils is presented in a balanced manner.
48. Pupils contribute to their local community and beyond through a range of charity initiatives supporting care homes for the elderly, medical charities and a range of local causes. These are overseen by sixth-form charity representatives and include bake sales, gift drives and foodbank collections. Junior school pupils visit the foodbank to learn about its work, while older pupils sing to care home residents.
49. The school provides pupils with many opportunities to learn the difference between right and wrong. In the early years, children learn how to take turns and be kind to each other. In junior school, pupils learn about the importance of following the school rules and how these help the school community be positive and well run. Older pupils get the opportunity to help oversee the enforcement of the school rules, such as at breaktime when younger pupils can draw on their support.
50. The careers guidance in the sixth form is accessible to pupils and is well used. Sixth-form pupils benefit from the school's alumni community and from personalised support with their applications to university or for employment. Work experience opportunities, including at local firms, are available to pupils. Leaders implement a suitable careers programme for pupils in Years 7 to 11

which includes use of an online guidance package, visits from alumni, a careers fair and specialist careers days, which include visits from representatives from Cumbria Police and the Royal Navy. However, the careers guidance for pupils in these years is inconsistently effective. For example, pupils are not always aware of, or enabled to access, the online careers guidance that is available.

51. Pupils receive effective economic education through the PSHE programme and the wider curriculum. Pupils in junior school address money-related problems in mathematics, while lessons in senior school include sessions on saving, personal finance and the dangers of gambling. Older pupils can run stalls at school events and are helped to set up their own businesses, such as selling jewellery they have made. Sixth-form pupils receive guidance on student loans and budgeting.
52. Leaders have enhanced the channels through which pupils are listened to by introducing regular pupil forums. These have contributed to changes to lunch and tuck shop menus. Leaders maintain respectful dialogue with pupils when pupils' suggested changes are more difficult to enact.
53. Children in the early years are encouraged to interact socially. They learn to take turns and share resources and activities considerately. Staff encourage children to listen to each other respectfully. Children demonstrate their growing social understanding throughout the day, including in play, snack and mealtimes.

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

54. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

55. Leaders do not ensure that all staff receive regular and up-to-date safeguarding training.
56. Leaders do not keep an adequate record of low-level concerns as required by current statutory guidance. This means that leaders are unable to review low-level concerns to identify any potential patterns in staff conduct and ensure that leaders follow up any concerns with appropriate actions.
57. Governors are suitably trained in safeguarding matters. They ensure that the safeguarding policy is in line with current statutory guidance, but they do not ensure that it is implemented effectively.
58. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities respond to safeguarding concerns effectively. They access external advice through local agencies, including regular meetings with local authority representatives, to support their work in safeguarding pupils. Leaders maintain detailed and secure safeguarding records in line with the requirements of current statutory guidance. Leaders provide comprehensive safeguarding training to staff as part of their induction, including with regard to the 'Prevent' duty that relates to the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
59. Leaders ensure that appropriate safer recruitment checks are carried out on all adults before they begin to work or volunteer at the school. They maintain a suitable single central record of appointments (SCR) that records these checks accurately.
60. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online. A robust internet filtering and monitoring system is in place. Leaders ensure that filtering arrangements are checked and evaluated frequently. The digital monitoring system creates immediate alerts regarding harmful or concerning activity, which are swiftly responded to. This helps to mitigate risks such as exposure to harmful content or online bullying. Leaders maintain communication with parents about supporting digital safety.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

61. Standards are not met consistently with respect to the provision of suitable safeguarding training and the keeping of a log of low-level concerns.
62. As a result, Standards relating to safeguarding are not met.

63. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.

Schedule of unmet Standards

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

The following Standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR ¹ Part 7, paragraph 33	The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which –
33(d)	allows for a complaint to be made and considered initially on an informal basis;
33(e)	where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (d), establishes a formal procedure for the complaint to be made in writing;
33(f)	where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e), makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint;
33(g)	ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school;
33(h)	allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish;
33(i)	provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is –
33(i)(i)	provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
33(i)(ii)	available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;
33(j)	provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and –
33(j)(i)	whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
33(j)(ii)	action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld); and
33(k)	provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests

¹ The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('ISSR')

² Early years foundation stage statutory framework ('EYFS')

	access to them.
ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34(1)	The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school –
34(1)(a)	demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
34(1)(b)	fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
34(1)(c)	actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.
EYFS ² 3.98	<p>Providers must put in place a written procedure for dealing with concerns and complaints from parents and/or carers, and must keep a written record of any complaints, and their outcome. All providers must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate written complaints relating to how they are fulfilling the EYFS requirements. • Notify the person who made the complaint of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint. • Make a record of complaints available to Ofsted, or the CMA with which a provider of CoDP is registered, on request.

Safeguarding

The following Standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that –
7(a)	arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
7(b)	such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
EYFS 3.5	Providers must have and implement policies and procedures to keep children safe and meet EYFS requirements. Schools are not required to have separate policies to cover EYFS requirements provided the requirements are already met through an existing policy. Where providers are required to have policies and procedures as specified below, these policies and procedures should be recorded in writing. Policies and procedures should be in line with the guidance and procedures of the relevant LSP.
EYFS 3.30	Providers must ensure that all practitioners are trained in line with the criteria set out in Annex C. Providers must ensure that practitioners are supported and confident to implement the setting's safeguarding policy and procedures on an ongoing basis. Providers should read 'What to do if you're worried a child is being abused: Advice for practitioners'.
EYFS 3.32	Training must be renewed every two years. Providers may consider whether any staff need to undertake annual refresher training during any two-year period to

	help maintain basic skills and keep up to date with any changes to safeguarding procedures or as a result of any safeguarding concerns that occur in the setting.
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School details

School	Austin Friars
Department for Education number	942/6032
Registered charity number	516289
Address	Austin Friars Etterby Scaur Carlisle Cumbria CA3 9PB
Phone number	01228 528042
Email address	office@austinfriars.co.uk
Website	www.austinfriars.co.uk
Proprietor	Austin Friars
Chair	Mr Ewen Swinton
Headteacher	Mr Christopher Hattam
Age range	3 to 18
Number of pupils	284
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 November 2022

Information about the school

64. Austin Friars is an independent co-educational day school. It was founded in 1951 by the Friars of the Order of St Augustine, though is now independent of the Augustinian Order. The school is a registered charity, overseen by a governing body. The current chair of governors took up his role in June 2023.
65. The school is divided into a senior school, for pupils aged 11 to 18 years, which includes a sixth form, and a junior school, for pupils aged 3 to 11 years, which includes the early years for children aged 3 to 5 years.
66. There are 22 children in the early years comprising one Nursery class and one Reception class.
67. The school has identified 69 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
68. The school has identified 17 pupils as speaking English as an additional language (EAL).
69. The school states its aims are to provide an excellent education inspired by its Augustinian values. It intends to nurture the individuality of each pupil while helping them discover and develop their talents and passions.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	21 to 23 October 2025
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70. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The on-site inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

71. 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.

72. 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

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For more information, please visit isi.net