

School inspection report

2 to 4 December 2025

The Gower School

10 Cynthia Street

Barnsbury

London

N1 9JF

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. The proprietor establishes positive relationships with staff, parents and pupils and maintains effective oversight of the school. Relationships across the school are warm and individual pupils are well known. Interactions are respectful and kind, and teachers create a supportive and nurturing environment. Leaders seek regular feedback from all stakeholders and act upon it promptly. Complaints are handled effectively, with an emphasis on swift resolution, and risks are identified and mitigated well. Leaders and managers apply appropriate skills and knowledge so that the Standards are consistently met.
2. The curriculum is matched to pupils' age and aptitudes effectively, including in the early years. It covers a broad range of subjects that develop linguistic, creative, mathematical, scientific, technological and other learning. Teachers have high expectations for their pupils and adapt work, offer support and provide challenge according to pupils' needs and levels of prior attainment. Teachers plan together and assess progress regularly to understand how best to meet pupils' needs. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning well. A variety of extra-curricular opportunities are offered which develop pupils' interests.
3. Parents are provided with detailed reports that inform them about their child's attainment, progress and next steps. However, when the inspection commenced, leaders did not ensure that teachers in Year 1 received all information from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile completed for children at the end of the Reception year. Leaders rectified this before the end of the inspection.
4. Leaders prioritise pupils' emotional wellbeing and, together with staff, foster warm and nurturing relationships across the school. Leaders support pupils' self-esteem by celebrating their achievements in newsletters and assemblies. A positive culture encourages good behaviour and enables pupils to become adept at resolving conflict. Tolerance and understanding of people who have different faiths and beliefs is encouraged, and bullying is effectively addressed. Physical health is fostered through dedicated provision for physical education (PE) and sport. Pupils are provided with opportunities to take on leadership roles and learn to take on responsibility. The school site is well maintained and pupils are supervised effectively.
5. Leaders at the school ensure that pupils actively contribute to their community and develop a purposeful sense of social responsibility. Pupils develop their understanding of democracy and competent debating skills. They are elected to positions of responsibility which allow them to contribute suggestions towards the school's development. Leaders value pupils' views and, where possible, act upon them. Pupils' economic awareness is developed through enterprise activities, charitable fundraising and visits to local shops, where they purchase different foods. Pupils learn about the diversity of cultures and religions.
6. Leaders promote the school's commitment to safeguarding and expect staff to share any concerns they have about pupils. Safer recruitment procedures are rigorous and followed by a thorough induction for all staff. The safeguarding policy is detailed and informative. The school liaises effectively with the local authority, using them for regular advice and training. Staff receive annual safeguarding training so that they are up to date with their knowledge. However, some staff's understanding of low-level concerns is not as secure as possible.

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 Early Years Foundation Stage Profile completed for children at the end of the Reception year is fully shared with Year 1 teachers
- ensure that all staff have a secure understanding of low-level concerns.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. The proprietor maintains a detailed understanding of the school's effectiveness and areas for development. The proprietor's day-to-day involvement in the school allows them to be accessible to staff, pupils and parents, and to monitor the school effectively, ensuring that the Standards are consistently met. The proprietor monitors how leaders fulfil their roles and demonstrate that they have the appropriate knowledge and skills.
8. Leaders promote the school's aims, ensuring that these are embedded across school activities and modelled effectively by staff.
9. Leaders carry out effective self-evaluation, informed by feedback from pupils. Leaders conduct a termly survey to assess pupils' wellbeing and attitude to school. They monitor the impact of teaching and the use of resources regularly through learning walks and lesson drop-ins and actively discuss pupils' work with them. Leaders take effective action to develop these areas if required.
10. Leaders ensure that staff have an appropriate understanding of risk and that they take actions to mitigate any identified risks or hazards where possible. Teachers take careful and appropriate measures when escorting pupils to the local park for breaktimes and conduct further risk assessment on arrival, checking the park to identify and mitigate any potential risks before pupils are allowed to play there.
11. Leaders ensure that the school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. They implement a suitable accessibility plan which is revised at regular intervals in order to ensure that all pupils can access the facilities and the curriculum.
12. A suitable written policy details how complaints are considered. Leaders ensure that complaints are resolved as soon as possible. Leaders actively seek out parents to discuss their concerns. The availability of leaders at the school gate each day enables leaders to gather and understand parent's perspectives. The log of complaints records all relevant details of these and any actions taken as a result.
13. Policies are detailed and reviewed annually. They are available to parents on the school's website along with other required information and are effectively implemented. Parents also receive detailed reports on their child's progress across a range of subjects. The reports include next steps and targets, and an explanation of results and standardised test scores.
14. Leaders ensure that provision in the early years meets the needs of children so that they make good progress and have a successful start to their time at school. Teachers maintain a keen focus on each individual's successes and personal development so they are nurtured and have positive experiences. As a result, children develop their emotional wellbeing and build solid foundations for their future learning. Parents receive considerable information on their child's progress. However, at the start of the inspection, teachers in Year 1 had not received all the information from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile that had been completed for children at the end of the Reception year. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.
15. Leaders liaise effectively with external agencies, including the local authority. They provide the local authority with all necessary information relating to any use of funding for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

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

16. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. Leaders provide a curriculum that is carefully designed to enable pupils to develop skills across a suitably broad range of subjects. Pupils of all ages are challenged in every subject through curriculum content that goes beyond the age-related expectations of the national curriculum and are well prepared for entrance examinations for selective schools. The curriculum is planned to enable children to revisit and build on previously studied topics, such as in mathematics. Themed days are used effectively to bring the curriculum to life and enable pupils to apply their skills, as they solve practical problems in mathematics, describe characters in English texts before acting them out, and perform scenarios from different subjects in drama.
18. Teaching is age appropriate and relevant to the aptitudes of the pupils. Teachers use effective teaching methods, including skilful questioning, to enable pupils to make good progress. Work is adapted for pupils with different levels of prior attainment and all are encouraged to attempt challenges, with subsequent successes adding to their confidence. Teachers plan collaboratively on a weekly basis to ensure that appropriate support and challenge is offered to pupils. Pupils are presented with suitable opportunities to extend their learning in events such as the 'primary maths challenge', and competitions in art, public speaking and debating. Teachers have high expectations for what pupils can achieve and tasks are often set that are complex and beyond national age-related expectations, for example the mapping of a story on myths and legends by pupils in Year 1 and the use and application of Roman numerals by pupils in Year 4.
19. Leaders provide systematic opportunities to develop pupils' linguistic and communication skills. Regular opportunities for presentations and contributions to assemblies develop oral skills, and debating develops listening and discursive skills as pupils expand on comments from their peers. These are extended through LAMDA (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art) lessons. Pupils are actively involved in their learning. They respond well to the feedback they are given and successfully apply the skills they have learnt to develop their independent thinking and learning.
20. In the early years, specialist teaching and a broad extra-curricular offer enrich learning, cultivating academic and creative skills and contributing to children's well-rounded development. Ongoing observations and assessment inform planning, ensuring that learning is tailored to children's needs and interests and builds on their prior knowledge. Staff plan activities to include rich language experiences and problem-solving opportunities, encouraging children's participation and development of skills across the curriculum.
21. Leaders ensure that the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is responsive to their individual needs. Early identification of pupils' individual needs enables staff to act swiftly and implement appropriate strategies. Staff involve parents in contributing towards individual learning plans (ILPs) that identify methods to develop pupils' learning that can be used at school and at home.
22. Leaders ensure that pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate support when required so that they can acquire the necessary language skills and develop their conversational language and accuracy of grammar. Pupils who speak EAL often make rapid progress.

23. Leaders implement a well-developed system of assessment to track pupils' progress. They scrutinise assessment data termly to determine how well individuals and groups of pupils are progressing. Leaders use their findings to provide additional challenge or support when needed.

24. The school provides pupils with opportunities to develop new skills and interests through a varied extra-curricular programme that involves a wide range of sports and activities such as cheerleading, dance and construction-brick club. Starting in the early years, educational visits and extra-curricular activities such as ballet, science club, choir and gymnastics provide real-world contexts and reinforce the skills and concepts explored in the classroom.

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

25. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

26. Pupils' emotional wellbeing is a priority for leaders and teachers at the school. Relationships between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves are warm and nurturing. Leaders and staff promote kindness and respect in interactions. As a consequence, pupils are courteous and polite as they move around the school.
27. Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons are planned effectively to develop pupils' self-awareness and understanding of others. Pupils learn to listen to and respect others' viewpoints and understand that people's opinions can differ. Pupils record their own perspectives in booklets and consider what actions they would take in response to different real-life scenarios, such as the exclusion of individuals from play. The school's relationships education programme helps develop pupils' understanding of the importance of healthy relationships and how it is important to treat others respectfully.
28. Leaders boost pupils' self-esteem and confidence by sharing and celebrating their achievements at home and at school over the week, including through 'great work' rewards. These are shared in newsletters and assemblies, where pupils receive mentions for noteworthy performances in the classroom, on the sports field and more generally across school life. Pupils are also rewarded with different badges and certificates for their progress in reading and mathematics, which contribute to their self-esteem.
29. Pupils learn about different faiths and beliefs. They participate in celebrations for occasions such as Thanksgiving, Lunar New Year and Yom Kippur and develop understanding of why these festivals are important to people of different cultures and religions. Parental presentations on different beliefs and practices are also used effectively to share personal experiences and allow pupils to find out more about different religions.
30. Leaders consistently affirm the value of positive and considerate behaviour among pupils. Pupils are taught conflict resolution skills from a young age and become adept and independent at this. As a result, pupils in the older years have highly developed mediation skills and often resolve any problems that arise without requiring any additional help from staff, though support is provided when required. Strategies such as the 'peace table' are used effectively to encourage pupils to voice their perspectives and resolve any issues that they might have by listening to and respecting one another's viewpoints.
31. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of what constitutes bullying as a result of having been taught strategies to identify such behaviour. Instances of bullying are rare, but when concerns are raised, leaders and staff deal with them swiftly and effectively, ensuring that all parties take an active role in resolving the matter.
32. Teachers are strategically deployed to provide appropriate supervision, and their presence contributes to a supportive environment within the school. Consequently, pupils are confident and secure in navigating their daily routines. In the early years, a suitable ratio of adults to children enables close supervision and the provision of support and encouragement.

33. Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their physical health and fitness through PE lessons and sports fixtures against other schools. Pupils develop their understanding of the importance of warming up before exercise to guard against any muscular strains or injuries. PE lessons build on prior learning and enable pupils to develop co-ordination, movement and ball-aiming skills, such as when playing dodgeball or aiming and throwing at a target. The sports programme develops pupils' skills and ability to compete in sports such as football, rugby, cross-country and netball. Pupils swim regularly and develop competent water safety skills.

34. The school site is well maintained and contains suitable facilities, including outdoors. Health and safety matters are given appropriate consideration and repairs are carried out quickly. Mandatory training in fire safety and risk assessment equips staff with the skills and knowledge to understand and implement the school's health and safety and fire safety arrangements. Fire safety equipment and emergency lighting are checked and serviced regularly to ensure their effectiveness, should they be needed. Regular fire drills, clear signage and specialist training for fire wardens are in place.

35. First aid arrangements are effective. Pupils are appropriately cared for should they become injured or unwell. Staff keep suitable records of any administration of first aid or medication. Staff are suitably trained in first aid, including in paediatric first aid in the early years.

36. Children in the early years benefit from an effective partnership between home and school that is founded on regular communication. The school works with parents to promote and reinforce children's management of their emotions and positive interactions. Children develop independence, responsibility and leadership through activities such as feeding the guinea pig and arranging flowers in the role of 'flower helper'.

37. The school keeps accurate records of admission and attendance registers in line with current statutory requirements. Leaders promote the benefits of regular attendance in newsletters and parents' meetings and highlight the detrimental effect that absence can have on pupils in terms of anxiety, participation and mental health. Leaders follow up any concerns about absenteeism suitably and notify the local authority whenever any pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition.

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

38. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

39. The school actively promotes British values, such as tolerance and understanding of those who represent different cultures and faiths, encouraging pupils to express their views respectfully while appreciating different opinions. Pupils learn that all human beings have the same rights and should be respected, regardless of any differences such as skin colour or religion. An inclusive ethos is encouraged through the curriculum, enabling pupils to learn about equality, diversity and inclusion. Pupils also learn about children's rights and the rule of law and have a well-developed understanding of the importance of fair treatment.
40. The school develops pupils' sense of responsibility towards others. Leaders ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Children in the early years take on responsibilities as 'leader of the day' and are trusted to help lay the table for lunch. For older pupils, music captains encourage their fellow pupils to play an instrument in assembly and sports captains help promote positive interactions between pupils at house events. Pupils acting as 'librarians' champion reading throughout the school, and the school council makes suggestions for school developments such as the 'free exchange' library and facilities in the school playground. The school's house system is effective in promoting a sense of community and belonging.
41. Pupils contribute to the local community. Pupils are encouraged to donate 'kindness bags', containing essential items such as pyjamas, scarves, gloves and books, to local charities that support people for whom such items are not as accessible.
42. The school enables pupils to develop their understanding of democracy. Pupils visit the Houses of Parliament to see debates in action and learn skills that they use effectively in their own debates. Pupils stand for election for roles of responsibility and vote on suggested charities to ensure that all have an equal say. Pupils learn about democratic choice and understand from an early age that they may not get the outcome they desire if the majority vote for something else. Staff ensure that any discussions that contain political themes or content are conducted fairly and without bias.
43. Pupils develop an understanding of British institutions. For example, they visit the Royal Courts of Justice to develop their respect for the law and learn about the legal process. Leaders arrange visits to local community institutions such as the local bookshop and the Museum of Childhood to develop pupils' awareness and appreciation of services they can access in their local community.
44. Pupils acquire economic understanding. Children in the early years engage in a variety of practical experiences to develop their understanding of finance and money. These include role-play shops and practical mathematical activities like counting money and purchasing cakes or other items during charitable events. Pupils visit local shops to buy fruit and vegetables, developing their understanding of the monetary value of different coins. Older pupils organise an enterprise initiative to manage a budget, make financial arrangements and raise funds successfully for a trip or activity.

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

45. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

46. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding promote the school's commitment to effective safeguarding so that all staff understand their responsibility towards this. Members of the safeguarding team work closely together and review safeguarding concerns that arise collectively, sharing their expertise so that agreement is reached on when thresholds are met for referring cases to the local authority. Leaders work in partnership with the local authority and external agencies and approach them for advice when useful, referring safeguarding concerns onto them when appropriate. The proprietor maintains suitable oversight of safeguarding. They ensure that the safeguarding policy is up to date and contains helpful information, and that the policy and procedures comply with current statutory requirements.
47. Leaders ensure that all staff are suitably trained, supported by personnel from the local authority to deliver up-to-date safeguarding training so that staff understand their responsibilities. New staff receive a rigorous induction from senior school staff, information from external agencies and online resources and training. This training is regularly updated, including whenever there are changes to statutory guidance. However, some staff's understanding of low-level concerns is not as secure as that typically demonstrated across the school.
48. Staff report any concerns that they might have about pupils appropriately. Leaders take prompt action to deal with safeguarding concerns when they arise. They keep detailed safeguarding records in order to build a chronology of events and make well-informed decisions about the support that pupils affected by safeguarding issues may need.
49. The school implements a robust internet filtering and monitoring system. Leaders conduct regular checks and follow up any potentially inappropriate searches. Pupils are taught about online safety in their PSHE lessons and learn about the importance of keeping personal information confidential and of reporting any concerns that might arise.
50. The proprietor maintains diligent oversight of safer recruitment procedures and ensures that the school carries out all required suitability checks before staff commence work at the school. Monthly reviews of the single central record of appointments (SCR) ensure that it remains well maintained and contains accurate information about all relevant checks.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

51. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	The Gower School
Department for Education number	206/6381
Address	The Gower School 10 Cynthia Street Barnsbury London N1 9JF
Phone number	020 7278 2020
Email address	barnsbury@thegowerschool.co.uk
Website	www.thegowerschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Miss Emma Gowers
Headteacher	Miss Emma Gowers
Age range	3 months to 11 years
Number of pupils	166
Number of children in the early years registered setting	99
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 November 2022

Information about the school

52. The Gower School is an independent co-educational nursery and primary day school. It occupies three sites in the London Borough of Islington. The registered nursery school, which opened in 2000, occupies two buildings at the North Road site and the primary school, which opened in 2007, educates children from Reception to Year 6 at a site about a mile and a half away. The school has been accredited as a Montessori school since 2008. It is a private limited company overseen by the sole proprietor who is also the headteacher of the school.
53. The school comprises a registered early years setting for children aged 3 months to 4 years, a Reception Year for children aged 4 to 5 years, a lower school for pupils aged 5 to 7 years and an upper school for pupils aged 7 to 11 years. The registered early years setting was not included in this inspection.
54. There are 28 children in the Reception year, comprising one Reception class.
55. The school has identified 27 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
56. The school has identified a very small proportion of pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
57. The school states its aims are for all children to be happy, confident learners who achieve their potential. It aspires for pupils to be thoughtful, considerate and self-motivated learners who are independent, enquiring and articulate thinkers, prepared to face new challenges. The school intends for pupils to achieve their potential through supportive teaching and a broad, creative curriculum. It aims to encourage pupils to show respect to themselves and each other, and to be kind, supportive and inclusive of everyone.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	2 to 4 December 2025
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58. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The on-site inspection was quality assured by a remote monitor.

59. 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 proprietor
- 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.

60. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit www.isi.net.

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