

School inspection report

13 to 15 January 2026

King's College School

West Road

Cambridge

Cambridgeshire

CB3 9DN

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 have the appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles effectively and ensure that the Standards are met. Governors support leaders so that regular review of provision takes place, which leads to focused development plans designed to improve the school and promote the wellbeing of pupils. Leaders ensure that the school's values are well understood by staff and pupils.
2. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and a range of academic programmes that complement and enhance lessons. Teachers plan and deliver effective lessons so that pupils make progress over time and understand what they need to do to improve. Pupils participate in a range of musical activities, which includes singing and playing an instrument. Pupils also engage in other activities so that they are exposed to a wide range of experiences.
3. The school provides personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) that educates pupils about how to support their own physical and emotional wellbeing and behave respectfully towards others. For instance, pupils learn about how to maintain a healthy diet and the importance of courtesy. Effective systems are in place to support and promote good behaviour.
4. A comprehensive set of systems and processes are in place to ensure that health and safety arrangements are effective. These include regular fire safety drills, effective medical provision and sufficient staff supervision of pupils.
5. Leaders organise external speakers to attend the school and talk to pupils about possible career pathways. However, the careers guidance provided does not develop pupils' knowledge of these possible pathways as comprehensively as possible.
6. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to offer feedback about the school. However, pupils are not always confident that their views have been considered and unsure why actions that they have suggested have not been taken.
7. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are well established and effective. Staff are well trained and know what to do if they are concerned about a pupil or another member of staff. Leaders instil a vigilant safeguarding culture so that all staff understand their responsibilities in this area.
8. The school undertakes appropriate pre-employment checks on all adults working at the school. However, when the inspection commenced, there was a minor administration error in the single central record of appointments (SCR). In particular, it did not accurately record the prohibition from teaching checks that had been carried out on visiting teachers. Leaders rectified this before the end of the inspection.
9. Leaders ensure that boarders are well supported and maintain a balanced schedule so that they can pursue their ambitions and interests whilst maintaining positive emotional wellbeing.

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 single central record of appointments accurately records the prohibition from teaching checks carried out on visiting teachers
- strengthen the careers guidance programme so the pupils develop a greater understanding of possible career pathways
- strengthen the feedback provided to pupils about their suggestions for school improvement to raise pupils' confidence of how their ideas have been considered.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors provide effective oversight of school policies and procedures to ensure that the Standards are met. Governors maintain a firm understanding of what happens at the school and regularly visit so that they can engage with both staff and pupils. Leaders provide governors with regular reports, which secure their understanding of what is happening at the school. This knowledge enables governors to support leaders well and provide suitable challenge when required.
11. Leaders engage in a rigorous process of self-evaluation so that they are able to understand the school's successes and areas for development. This enables leaders to devise development plans that identify actions designed to enhance the provision for pupils. For instance, the recent development of the mathematics laboratory has raised the profile of mathematics at the school and provided additional opportunities for stretch and challenge for pupils with higher prior attainment in this area.
12. Leaders foster an environment centred around the promotion of the school's values of 'kindness, creativity, strength and community'. Leaders and staff use these school values, well known by pupils and staff, to help promote the wellbeing of pupils. Pupils are encouraged to pursue their interests through hard work and commitment in order to become confident and curious individuals.
13. Leaders possess the knowledge and skills required to fulfil their roles effectively. They devise and implement effective policies so that the Standards are met. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders implement a suitable accessibility plan, which identifies clear adjustments to the school site and curriculum to facilitate their accessibility to any pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Male and female pupils are provided with equal access to opportunities across all provision at the school.
14. Leaders work in partnership with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils. They maintain effective links with, for example, external safeguarding partners and the local authority. Leaders inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
15. Leaders have a comprehensive system in place to identify and manage risk in order to promote the wellbeing of pupils. Relevant staff are trained so that they can effectively manage and monitor risk at the school. Appropriate risk assessments are in place and regularly reviewed to ensure that they continue to identify and mitigate potential risks effectively.
16. The school's website provides required information for parents. Information that is not available on the website is shared directly. Staff keep parents well informed about their child's progress through parents' evenings and detailed, regular reports so that they have an understanding of their child's progress and development.
17. Leaders provide a clear complaints procedure that allows parents to raise any concerns they may have on both an informal and formal basis. Leaders ensure that a comprehensive record of all concerns is kept, which includes details of how matters have been investigated, the actions taken and the outcome. Leaders ensure that any concerns that boarding pupils have are listened to and appropriate action taken. The school maintains a record of complaints made by boarders.

18. Leaders in the early years ensure that all staff working in this department of the school are suitably trained and supported, including through regular meetings to discuss practice and professional development. Leaders ensure that all the early years requirements applicable to the school are complied with.
19. Boarding leaders ensure that the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (NMS) are met. Leaders create a positive boarding environment and provide suitable boarding accommodation so that boarders feel supported and cared for.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. Leaders ensure that the curriculum provides learning experiences and challenges across a broad range of subject areas. Schemes of work are designed to develop subject knowledge and skills in a sequenced and age-appropriate way, exposing pupils to subjects beyond the national curriculum.
22. Children in the early years explore topics through a thematic curriculum which exposes them to a range of areas focusing on a specific topic. For instance, for the theme 'dinosaurs', children replicate dinosaur movements in physical education (PE) lessons and sing about dinosaurs in music lessons. Children develop their language and literacy skills through structured group discussions and focused lessons about the formation of letters and their relationship to sounds.
23. Pupils study creative subjects such as music, drama and art as well as modern foreign languages (MFL), classics, and theology, philosophy and religion (TPR). The 'Cresco' programme introduces pupils to additional disciplines beyond the national curriculum to facilitate further breadth of learning. These areas include, for instance, engineering, archaeology, sustainability and critical thinking.
24. The 'Optio' initiative allows pupils to develop responsibility for their own learning, giving them the opportunity to discuss work with teachers and address any misconceptions during dedicated time periods across the school week. The 'Vaulted' learning programme concentrates on developing skills such as collaboration and reflection by focusing on one skill at a time across all subjects for specified time periods. For example, teachers focused on teamwork across a six-week period. The integrated nature of this approach provides pupils with the means to develop key learning skills.
25. Pupils make good progress from their starting points and achieve above the national averages in English, reading, mathematics, science and spelling. Leaders ensure that effective systems are in place to track pupils' attainment and progress. This enables the school to devise targeted support for pupils where required. Leaders use data to focus on areas of the curriculum so that outcomes are consistent across subjects.
26. Leaders ensure that curriculum planning and classroom practice are well organised and aligned, enabling teachers to deliver lessons confidently and purposefully. This supports consistent expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes and effective learning experiences. Teachers plan well-structured lessons informed by good subject knowledge. Their effective use of teaching methods and suitable resources results in pupils engaging in tasks and developing confidence in their own skills and understanding.
27. Teachers provide detailed written and oral feedback to pupils so that they understand what to do to improve and make progress. Reports to parents are shared on a regular basis, which includes a target for each subject so that parents can support pupils with their development.
28. Leaders have put an effective system in place for identifying and monitoring pupils who have SEND. Teachers use data, classroom observations and a referral system to ensure pupils who may have SEND are provided with an appropriate level of support while their needs are identified. Staff in the dedicated 'Learning Hub' work closely with teachers to ensure that pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.

29. A large number of pupils at the school speak two or more languages. Most current pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) do not require any additional support for their English. Where such support is required, appropriate provision, such as additional support with reading, is put in place to enable pupils who speak EAL to make good progress.
30. All pupils engage in some form of musical activity, which includes playing an instrument and singing in at least one of the choirs. There are a number of choirs within the school; some pupils, girls and boys, who are selected to be part of the 'chorister programme' also sing with specialist choirs inside and outside the school structure. In addition, leaders provide a wide range of other enriching activities for pupils. For instance, there is a competitive chess club, the 'bagpipe chanter' class and squash. This range of activities enhances pupils' social skills and confidence and helps develop a wide range of interests and passions.
31. Boarders are provided with a suitable range of activities in the evenings and at the weekends to develop relationships and their social skills. Boarders are also given a suitable amount of free time, enabling independence and sufficient balance between academic work and other pursuits. Boarders are provided with dedicated time to complete homework tasks with the opportunity to ask boarding staff for support.

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. Leaders support pupils' spiritual understanding by teaching them about different religions and points of view through TPR lessons. For example, pupils discuss questions such as the existence of God, from a range of perspectives and viewpoints so that they are well informed and equipped to develop their own spiritual perspectives.
34. Leaders provide a comprehensive PSHE curriculum. The school uses a scheme of work which is responsive to the needs of pupils. It explores suitable themes in an age-appropriate manner, such as peer pressure, safe digital communication and, in relationships and sex education (RSE), healthy intimate relationships.
35. The RSE component of the PSHE programme reflects the requirements of current statutory guidance. It covers suitable and pertinent topics in an age-appropriate way, such as changing bodies, body image and identity. When required, staff adapt their teaching to cater for pupils who have SEND.
36. All pupils participate in PE and games that enable them to understand how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and develop physical skills and teamwork. Pupils are assessed against skill descriptors such as leadership and team spirit. The games provision is broad and access to sport is inclusive. As a result, there are high levels of engagement in physical activity. For instance, for those pupils less interested in traditional sports, alternative options like rock climbing exist.
37. Leaders implement a suitable behaviour policy and system of rewards and sanctions effectively. These, along with the clear behavioural expectations that leaders and staff have, support pupils' positive attitudes towards learning and encourage them to exhibit respect and kindness, in line with the school values. Leaders implement any sanctions in a way that promotes reflection and understanding of the consequences of behavioural choices. As a result, pupils learn to take responsibility and learn from mistakes. They behave well across the school.
38. Leaders provide an anti-bullying strategy which teaches pupils about different types of bullying and what they should do if they are worried about potential bullying. Incidents of bullying, which are rare, are logged and followed up with suitable actions. In such cases, leaders work with parents so that pupils are supported effectively.
39. The school site and facilities are well maintained through a robust system of regular checks and maintenance. Training is provided to relevant staff to help ensure the health and safety of the school community. Leaders comply with relevant fire safety regulations and maintain a comprehensive fire risk assessment. Fire drills take place throughout the year and pupils know what to do in the event of an emergency. Separate fire drills take place during boarding time so that boarders know what to do should an alarm be raised.
40. Leaders provide suitable provision and accommodation for pupils' medical needs. The school nurse is available throughout the school day for pupils that require support. A sufficient number of staff are trained in first aid, with staff in the early years holding appropriate paediatric first aid qualifications. Boarders know how to access help should they become unwell or injured and staff

trained in first aid are available for boarders at all times outside of the school day should such a need arise.

41. Leaders ensure that there is suitable supervision throughout the school day and during boarding time. Staff rotas facilitate effective supervision so that pupils can always receive support from an adult should they need to. Appropriate staff-to-child ratios are maintained at all times in the early years.
42. Leaders maintain suitable admissions and attendance registers in line with the requirements of current statutory guidance. Leaders respond to any concerns about attendance quickly so that attendance levels remain high. Systems are in place so that when pupils miss lessons as a result of extra-curricular activities, they are able to catch up on missed work.
43. Staff in the early years promote children's sense of security through their consistently warm interactions and clear routines. This supports emotional wellbeing and promotes good behaviour. Children develop their fine and gross motor skills through a range of well-designed activities and a physical education programme that responds to their needs.

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

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

45. Teachers develop pupils' economic knowledge through financial literacy classes which form part of the PSHE curriculum. For instance, pupils learn about mortgages and taxes to help prepare them for the future. In Year 8, pupils consider how society works by looking at inflation, the economy and the operation of the banking system.
46. Pupils are prepared for the workplace through interview practice, formal letter writing and leadership roles. The feedback from these activities helps them understand professional expectations and equips them with some of the skills required for adulthood. The school organises visiting speakers to talk to pupils about different careers. However, the careers guidance provided does not develop pupils' knowledge of possible career pathways as thoroughly as possible, to help enable pupils to make informed consideration of potential career options.
47. Pupils in Year 8 achieve their first or second choice of senior school, with many pupils obtaining scholarships. Scholarships are associated with a range of areas, primarily music and academics. Pupils are supported with their applications to senior schools through guidance and practice towards the admissions process and examinations,
48. The school council provides an opportunity for pupils to develop their leadership skills and enable them to share their views with the school. Boarders have additional mechanisms for sharing their views and ideas, such as the boarding and food councils. However, pupils are not always confident that their views have been considered and do not always understand the rationale behind decisions taken with regard to the suggestions that they have put forward. In boarding, there is a prefects system known as 'keepers', which gives pupils suitable responsibilities to assist in the boarding house.
49. Pupils learn to distinguish between right and wrong and to respect the rule of law and the importance of democracy. For instance, through the curriculum they discuss themes such as parliamentary sovereignty in the 17th century and the legal and moral arguments associated with it. In Year 6, pupils learn about the Magna Carta and the evolution of the constitutional monarchy. Pupils also experience the democratic process through representing others on the school council. These topics develop pupils' appreciation of public institutions and British values, preparing them for life in modern Britain. Staff maintain impartiality and ensure that balanced viewpoints are presented when political topics, such as the political system of the United States, are being explored. They ensure that any discussions about political themes are conducted impartially and without bias.
50. Teachers develop pupils' cultural awareness through a variety of means, including the assembly programme where global faiths and their festivals are shared, including Hanukkah and Diwali. There are also educational visits to a range of religious sites. Pupils and choristers participate regularly in cultural and civic events including the Cambridgeshire schools' carol service at King's Chapel.
51. International partnerships, such as the school's collaboration with a partner school in Sri Lanka, further enrich pupils' understanding of people's different circumstances around the world, which helps pupils to value what they have and motivates them to contribute to the wider community.

52. In the early years, children engage with each other and their teachers thoughtfully and courteously. Teachers carefully manage interactions that promote listening skills and provide children with the confidence to share their points of view. They encourage children to share resources and activities, take turns and interact with each other respectfully.

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

53. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

54. Governors provide effective oversight of safeguarding across the school. There is regular liaison between the governor responsible for safeguarding and leaders with responsibility for safeguarding to support the safeguarding provision.
55. Leaders effectively evaluate potential safeguarding risks at the school and take action to mitigate them. There are effective systems and processes for checking visitors and the management of lettings.
56. Leaders have created an effective safeguarding culture through well-understood expectations that all staff have a role in the safeguarding of pupils. Pupils can raise concerns in a variety of ways, including through a trusted adult and 'worry boxes'. Boarders also have access to an independent person should they wish to raise any concern.
57. Leaders responsible for safeguarding are well trained and maintain established links with safeguarding networks with other schools. Training for both new and existing staff is rigorous with a focus on an understanding of local safeguarding risks and how to identify and report any safeguarding concerns that might arise. Staff receive regular updates to ensure that their understanding of safeguarding issues and procedures remains up to date.
58. The safeguarding team takes appropriate action whenever safeguarding concerns are raised. They liaise effectively with external safeguarding agencies and refer concerns onto them when appropriate.
59. Leaders maintain a robust internet filtering and monitoring system which is regularly tested. Leaders take appropriate action whenever there is a potential attempt to access inappropriate content.
60. Staff are encouraged to raise any low-level concerns or allegations about other colleagues that may arise to ensure a vigilant safeguarding culture and so that appropriate action can be taken when necessary. A suitable record of such low-level concerns is maintained by the school.
61. Leaders ensure that appropriate and required pre-employment checks are carried out for all adults working at the school. Appropriate checks on, and agreements with, adults living on the school premises but not employed by the school are also in place. However, at the start of the inspection, the prohibition from teaching checks that had been carried out on visiting teachers were not accurately recorded on the SCR. Leaders rectified this minor administrative error before the end of the inspection.
62. The school teaches pupils how to stay safe online through the PSHE programme. Pupils learn about themes such as guarding against financial fraud, the dangers of sharing personal data and appropriate online relationships so that they know how to reduce the risk of online activity and seek help should any concerns arise.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

63. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	King's College School
Department for Education number	873/6000
Registered charity number	1200527
Address	King's College School West Road Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB3 9DN
Phone number	01223 365814
Email address	office@kcs.cambs.sch.uk
Website	www.kcs.cambs.sch.uk
Proprietor	King's College School, Cambridge
Chair	The Revd Dr Stephen Cherry
Headteacher	Mrs Yvette Day
Age range	4 to 14
Number of pupils	390
Number of boarding pupils	40
Date of previous inspection	31 January to 2 February 2023

Information about the school

64. King's College School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school situated in Cambridge. The school consists of a pre-prep department for children and pupils in Reception to Year 2, a junior department for pupils in Years 3 and 4 and a senior department for pupils in Years 5 to 8. The school educates the choristers for King's College Chapel. The school is a registered charity, owned and governed by its board of governors who are trustees of the charity.
65. The school offers full, weekly, flexi- and occasional boarding for both male and female pupils in Year 4 and above. Choristers in Years 4 and 5 are weekly boarders, and choristers in Years 6 to 8 are full boarders. Boarders are accommodated in one boarding house in the main school building, with separate living quarters for male and female boarders.
66. The early years setting comprises 29 children, who are taught in two Reception classes.
67. The school has identified 86 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
68. The school has identified English as an additional language for 137 pupils.
69. The school states that its aims are to foster tolerance and respect and promote the values of kindness, creativity, strength and community. The school states that it is committed to Christian values but welcomes pupils from all faiths and backgrounds.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

13 to 15 January 2026

70. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

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
- visits to the boarding house accompanied by pupils and staff
- 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**.

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