

School inspection report

16 to 18 September 2025

The King's School

Wrexham Road

Chester

Cheshire

CH4 7QL

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. Leadership successfully promotes the school's aims and values and prioritises pupils' wellbeing. Throughout the school the curriculum is balanced and well structured. The content for all subjects is taught in a logical and relevant order. This enables pupils to learn successfully and flourish.
2. Leaders make sure that the school's policies and systems are put in place consistently across the school. Risk management is embedded into daily operations. Potential risks are identified and actions to mitigate these are taken swiftly. Leaders' thorough documentation, audits by external specialists and governors' scrutiny support a safe environment. Pastoral systems support pupils' emotional and physical wellbeing. The recent developments in careers education and the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) reflect leaders' commitment to pupils' progress, wellbeing and preparation for life beyond school. Information provided to parents and parents of prospective pupils is comprehensive. However, the school's previous inspection reports were not on the school website as required. This was rectified during the inspection.
3. The school offers pupils an extensive co-curricular programme, in addition to numerous collaborative activities which are run through the school's house system. This provision is available to all pupils and participation levels are high. Pupils appreciate the impact of the co-curricular programme on increasing their confidence, wellbeing and achievements. Pupils work together in many different aspects of their education. They quickly develop their personal and social skills through taking on numerous leadership roles during pupil-led activities. Pupils' academic success is enhanced through a wide range of enrichment activities. The co-curricular opportunities available to pupils is a significant strength of the school.
4. Pupils are self-confident and have high self-esteem. They are at ease during discussions with adults. They reflect on their experiences and on their school thoughtfully and in a balanced way. Pupils appreciate the diversity of backgrounds, cultures and religions within the school community and celebrate each other's successes. Leaders have created a warm, friendly and welcoming environment. Pupils respond well to this and their behaviour during lessons, in social areas and around the school is commendable.
5. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to develop social awareness through involvement in the local community, charity events and the extensive co-curricular programme. Pupils show empathy, respect for diversity and the ability to engage thoughtfully with differing viewpoints. Careers education has been identified by leaders as an area for development and they have implemented changes to improve the quality of career guidance for pupils.
6. The safeguarding of pupils across the school is a priority for leaders, staff and governors alike. Staff receive regular, certified training and understand the school's clear protocols for reporting concerns. Staff use the school's systems confidently and effectively, which ensures that swift action is taken to support vulnerable pupils. The school's proactive approach to bullying, digital safety and inclusion creates a culture of care, vigilance and trust where pupils feel safe and supported. Leaders use assemblies, pupil surveys and discussions with parents to keep safeguarding at the forefront and check the effectiveness of policies and procedures. The latest update to safeguarding procedures was enacted by staff before governors had scrutinised and approved the changes.

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 inspection reports published on the school's website include all those required within the Standards
- ensure that governor oversight of statutory policies takes place prior to their implementation across the school.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Leaders and governors ensure that the school's aims are clear to pupils and staff. Pupils are supported and cared for in an environment that is welcoming and inclusive. Leadership across the school enables pupils' progress, wellbeing and safety through strategic oversight and responsive practice. The school's comprehensive self-evaluation pinpoints areas for school development. This leads to the introduction of appropriate initiatives such as the 'learning to learn' programme, which is having a positive impact on pupils' academic attainment.
8. Leaders have devised and implemented a wide-ranging programme of co-curricular activities in all areas of school life that enhances pupils' wellbeing. Pupil participation is high and monitored by leaders to ensure everyone is included and to avoid pupils' overextension and overcommitment. Pupils with additional needs are well supported by specifically trained staff who are involved in the planning and delivery of activities to ensure pupils can fully access these through reasonable adjustments.
9. Subject leads are experts in their subject. They are well versed in effective teaching methods and have a secure understanding of the criteria used to evaluate and measure pupils' performance. They accurately pitch their teaching to match pupils' individual needs so that pupils learn subject-specific skills and knowledge quickly. Teachers ensure that pupils understand what they need to do next in their learning so that they make good progress and achieve their targets. In the senior school, the triennial subject reviews lead to greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across subject departments. Systems for tracking pupils' academic attainment are well established. They support subject leads to refine the curriculums, improve teaching and ensure pupils receive targeted support if required.
10. Pastoral leaders throughout the school understand the needs of individual pupils and ensure that these are addressed. Leaders consider many aspects of pupils' school experience. They review pupils' academic achievements and consider any safeguarding or wellbeing concerns so that pupils thrive and benefit from all areas of school life.
11. The school's website provides comprehensive information to parents about policies and procedures. At the start of the inspection, not all the required inspection reports were published on the website. This was rectified during the inspection.
12. Leaders consult with external agencies where appropriate to support pupils' wellbeing. Leaders complete annual reviews for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) to ensure that appropriate provision is in place. Currently, no pupils who have an EHC plan are in receipt of external funding.
13. Leaders have effective oversight of risk management and mitigate risk with care. Risk assessments are detailed, up to date and include steps to reduce risk which are implemented in practice. Fire and lockdown drills are conducted regularly. They contribute to the school's robust culture of safety. Pupils are taught how to manage risk confidently and responsibly in different situations.
14. The written complaints policy is in line with statutory requirements. Leaders keep a comprehensive log of complaints that includes timelines and details of resolution.

15. The school has a comprehensive accessibility plan that adheres to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The plan identifies the actions needed to improve pupils' access of the school site and the curriculum.
16. Governors ensure that leaders have the skills and knowledge to carry out their roles and responsibilities. Governors support and challenge leaders through a range of committees linked to different aspects of the school's work. Governors use their expertise and experience to provide specific support, such as in the early years.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. The curriculum has been designed with the ages and aptitudes of the pupils in mind and covers all the required areas of learning. The curriculum, and its implementation, is inclusive and in line with the school's aims and ethos. Pupils are taught a wide range of subjects. Teaching plans are adapted to suit pupils' individual needs, where necessary following consultation with parents and pupils. Pupils consistently achieve well in public examinations, with outcomes that are often above the national average at GCSE and A level.
19. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use different resources to explain key teaching points and support pupils' learning. The warm and positive teacher-pupil relationships encourage pupils to settle quickly to tasks and concentrate on their learning. Classrooms are welcoming, with many colourful displays that motivate pupils and create enjoyable learning environments.
20. Pupils acquire new skills and knowledge and make good progress. They respond thoughtfully and knowledgeably to teachers' prompts using subject-specific vocabulary accurately. Pupils work productively on their own and in pairs or small groups. In English, pupils in Year 9 respectfully analyse each other's work and give mature, helpful feedback. In many lessons, teachers use well-targeted questions and activities that challenge pupils to recall knowledge, develop their understanding and to be creative and critical thinkers.
21. Pupils throughout the school are proud of their work and keen to act on teachers' guidance and support. Pupils of all ages are encouraged to review their own work and this leads to a greater understanding of their next steps. For example, in design and technology (DT) lessons, pupils in Year 4 devise success criteria to evaluate their designs of a self-propelled car.
22. Leaders have implemented effective systems for checking pupils' attainment in different subjects. Leaders ensure that teaching staff have access to this information so that they can identify any gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge and adapt their teaching accordingly. Attainment data is regularly shared with parents, alongside comments regarding their child's academic progress but on occasion, these lack subject-specific detail.
23. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly and their needs are met so that they make good progress from their different starting points. Teachers make use of an online referral form to identify pupils who may have an additional learning need. Parents are informed and updated while assessments of need are carried out. Teachers adjust their teaching and use additional resources to support pupils who have SEND to learn successfully. The leader of provision for pupils who have SEND oversees the more specific and personalised support for pupils with more complex needs.
24. Pupils benefit from a rich and varied programme of co-curricular activities that notably enhances their educational experience. Pupils engage enthusiastically in a variety of sports, developing their skills in teamwork, leadership and physical confidence. Dramatic and musical endeavours are widespread and allow pupils to explore their creativity and expression, such as during the lunchtime 'brass blasters' group. Activities are well attended before, during and after the formal school day and at weekends. Pupil-led lunchtime clubs, such as the textiles and geopolitical clubs, offer creative and social opportunities, with older pupils taking on leadership and organisational roles that foster collaboration and emotional wellbeing. These activities are well supported by staff, ensuring that

pupils of all ages feel valued, challenged and able to explore new interests in a safe and purposeful environment.

25. In the early years, activities are well matched to children's needs and interests. Children understand the high expectations for their behaviour. They engage in their learning and concentrate well. Teachers model vocabulary and conversation skills to encourage children to listen carefully and to put forward their ideas. As a result, children communicate confidently. Teachers' consistent interactions with children and immediate feedback supports their early reading and writing skills. Children develop their physical, mathematical and creative skills through play and discovery. Children make good progress in their learning and development.

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

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

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

27. Pupils demonstrate high levels of self-confidence and mutual respect with their peers and with adults. The positive relationships throughout the school community support pupils' academic success and wellbeing. Leaders build in opportunities for reflection after assemblies, during school trips and through the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum. They have adapted social spaces in conjunction with pupils' views to create areas for quiet contemplation. The school has close links with Chester Cathedral and holds services there termly. Pupils write journals to record their thoughts and feelings. Pupils are prepared well for life in British society. Diversity is celebrated through the PSHE curriculum, festivals of world religions, cultural diversity week and other themed days.
28. Pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing is actively promoted through a coherent and integrated programme of curricular, co-curricular and pastoral provision. The high-quality physical education (PE) curriculum supports pupils' fitness, co-ordination and body awareness. The school's inclusive teaching and well-maintained facilities enable pupils to participate safely and confidently. Structured activities, such as swimming and personal survival techniques, foster pupils' resilience and self-worth.
29. Pupils across the school develop a secure spiritual and moral understanding through engaging teaching that encourages ethical reasoning, debate and reflection. Pupils in Year 9 are introduced to models of moral decision-making and are challenged to consider diverse perspectives during theology and philosophy lessons. Pupils explore complex dilemmas and philosophical ideas, responding with curiosity and independence. Teachers encourage pupils to think critically and consider alternative and diverse perspectives.
30. In the early years, children's physical development of gross and fine motor skills is encouraged through taught activities such as moving large logs in the woodland learning environment, the daily finger gym and exploring the wide variety of play equipment.
31. The PSHE curriculum is taught through age-appropriate lessons across all sections of the school. Pupils develop the skills to express their emotions and feelings and evaluate and analyse moral dilemmas. The relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum is age-appropriate and the content is in line with statutory requirements. Within the RSE curriculum, younger pupils learn how to be a good friend and resolve conflict, which supports the school's respectful and considerate environment. Older pupils study informed consent and how to manage online interactions appropriately. This helps them to keep safe and prepares them for life within and beyond the school community.
32. The school's behaviour policy is clear and understood by pupils and staff alike. Pupils respond to leaders' expectations and behave well. Pupils understand the rewards and sanctions systems and the rationale for them. Leaders and staff respond promptly and consistently to any incidents of misbehaviour, tracking any trends and adapting policy and practice as required. An appropriate anti-bullying strategy is in place throughout the school, including in the early years. The content taught during PSHE lessons and assemblies, sometimes led by the well-trained sixth form anti-bullying ambassadors, ensures that pupils know what constitutes bullying. They understand the strategies

they can use to avoid or respond to bullying should it occur and know the importance of being an active, rather than a passive bystander.

33. Admission and attendance registers are kept in line with statutory guidance and leaders liaise with the appropriate local authority when a pupil's absence causes concern. Leaders inform the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times of the year.
34. Pupils benefit from the school's robust health and safety procedures, including subject-specific safety protocols for DT, science and sport. The school's site is secure and well maintained. Staff supervise crossing points and drop-off zones. Medical provision is effective. The central medical centre is staffed by a qualified nurse and two mental health nurses, alongside staff in the infant school who are trained in paediatric first aid. Staff develop care plans for pupils' medical needs in consultation with families and external professionals, ensuring continuity of care and emotional security. Accident reporting is thorough and responsive, with trends analysed and addressed swiftly, contributing to the school's culture of vigilance and care.
35. There are many opportunities within the school for pupils to demonstrate leadership skills and show initiative, such as through responsibilities on a variety of councils, leading co-curricular activities and through the house system. Older pupils relish opportunities to support younger ones through the 'family' system in the senior school houses and 'happiness heroes' in the junior school. In doing so, pupil leaders provide excellent role models for their younger peers as well as acquiring key life skills.

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

36. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

37. Pupils are encouraged to engage with democratic principles through house activities that promote choice, voice and collective decision-making. Pupils in Year 11 contribute to planning initiatives such as music competitions. Sixth form prefects lead pupils' discussions while staff ensure everyone participates. Voting on preferred ideas supports pupils' understanding of fairness and responsibility.
38. In the early years, children learn the importance of sharing and taking turns through a variety of activities, including following a rota to use the interactive display board. Cultural understanding in the early years is enhanced by special events based on the children's own cultures, such as 'Finland day', German Christmas traditions and the making of Diwali lamps.
39. The school's emphasis on reflective thinking and opportunities to participate in discussions enables pupils to consider different viewpoints. Staff encourage pupils to collaborate with their peers and provide many opportunities for pupils to do this. As a result, pupils have well-developed teamwork skills. They are comfortable working with others to solve problems, and recognise the importance of discussing ideas in a sensitive way. Pupils show respect for others' views. They are considerate in their responses and supportive of each other. Pupils in the sixth form lead and carefully manage pupils' wide-ranging views and opinions during discussions in Year 10 tutor time, such as regarding house competitions or designs for the raised garden in the school grounds. Older pupils are careful to include a balanced perspective when talking about political events and leading the geopolitics club.
40. Careers guidance is a developing area of provision with well-established support for pupils in the sixth form. The newly-appointed head of futures is currently improving the careers guidance for pupils in other year groups. New initiatives, such as careers breakfasts with external professionals, are well attended by pupils from across the senior school.
41. Pupils' economic education is taught in all year groups through the PSHE curriculum. In the infant school, through the 'money matters' programme, pupils are taught how to keep money safe in bank accounts. Pupils in the junior school learn about cryptocurrency and pupils in the sixth form learn about budgeting and taxes.
42. Pupils are taught to understand and respect British institutions such as the police and judicial courts. Children in the early years learn about the role of the emergency services and pupils in the junior school are taught about Parliament and the law. Police personnel deliver regular talks to pupils in the senior school. This helps them to understand the functions of law enforcement in educating the public and upholding the law.
43. The opportunities and responsibilities available for pupils to contribute to the lives of others increase as they move through the school. They are encouraged to reflect on the way in which a community works and their obligations to others. Pupils develop a sound understanding of right and wrong. They accept responsibility for their actions. Pupils are eager to take on positions of responsibility from the wide range of roles available to them. The house system promotes interactions between pupils of different ages. The collaborative activities and earning of house points helps pupils to understand collective responsibility.

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

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

45. Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and that there is a proactive safeguarding culture throughout the school. Staff are well supported by the safeguarding team. They are given thorough training so that they fully understand the procedures in place to identify, report and record concerns. New staff are provided with a thorough safeguarding induction.
46. The safeguarding team responds effectively to any safeguarding concerns that are raised. The team liaises with relevant external agencies and refers concerns on to appropriate safeguarding partners, such as children's services and the police, when required. The designated safeguarding lead maintains suitable and detailed safeguarding records that are securely stored. Leaders follow statutory guidance to report a pupil's absence to the local authority and liaise with outside agencies when necessary to facilitate timely support. The safeguarding team meets regularly to discuss any emerging themes regarding concerns from across all sections of the school and considers the needs of individuals and specific groups of pupils.
47. Leaders and governors are trained in safer recruitment and meet regularly to oversee recruitment processes. All pre-appointment checks required by statutory guidance are conducted appropriately and recorded accurately in a suitable and well-maintained single central record of appointments (SCR).
48. Suitable measures are in place to reduce the risk of radicalisation to pupils. This includes extensive training for staff when they join the school, alongside regular updates that inform staff of contextual, local and national risks.
49. The school places a high priority on teaching pupils how to keep safe, including when online. Leaders have put robust internet filtering and monitoring systems in place and these arrangements are tested in line with statutory guidance.
50. The school's safeguarding committee, which includes governors, regularly reviews safeguarding arrangements to ensure that policies and practice are in line with current statutory guidance. Governors' oversight of any changes in the safeguarding policy or practice does not always take place before the changes have been implemented.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	The King's School
Department for Education number	896/6019
Registered charity number	525934
Address	The King's School Wrexham Road Chester Cheshire CH4 7QL
Phone number	01244 689500
Email address	info@kingschester.co.uk
Website	www.kingschester.co.uk
Proprietor	Governors of The King's School
Chair	Dr Sandra Verity
Headteacher	Mr George Hartley
Age range	4-19
Number of pupils	1167
Date of previous inspection	10 to 13 May 2022

Information about the school

52. The King's School is a co-educational day school, founded in Chester by King Henry VIII in 1541. The school is a charity overseen by a board of governors who are also its trustees. It comprises four sections, all based on the same site on the southern outskirts of Chester, Cheshire: an infant school, for pupils aged between four and seven, known as Willow Lodge; a junior school; a senior school; and a sixth form. Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a new chair of governors and opened a new sixth-form centre.
53. There are 43 children in the early years in two Reception classes.
54. The school has identified 207 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
55. The school has identified English as an additional language for 108 pupils.
56. The school states its aims are to be one of the country's leading academic day schools that equips students with the skills, courage and character to flourish in a constantly changing world, carrying with them a lifelong love of learning, commitment to service and the enduring King's spirit and values throughout their lives.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

16 to 18 September 2025

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

58. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of co-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.

59. 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

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

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