

School inspection report

23 to 25 September 2025

Kimbolton School

Kimbolton

Huntingdon

Cambridgeshire

PE28 0EA

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 have appropriate skills and training for their roles. They work closely with school leaders to ensure that pupil wellbeing is central to the school's ethos and at the heart of its planning for future development. Governors and leaders are effective in their monitoring and oversight of the implementation of policies to ensure that the school meets the requirements of the Standards.
2. Relevant information is provided to parents and other external agencies, as required, often through the school's website. At the beginning of the inspection, there was an omission in the school's safeguarding policy that did not reflect the high-quality practice in the school. This was rectified before the end of the inspection.
3. In the early years (EYFS), well-trained staff deliver a rich curriculum in a safe and stimulating learning environment which promotes children's learning, social skills and self-confidence. The youngest children get a good start to their education and are well prepared for Year 1.
4. Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from a broad and well-resourced academic curriculum. Teaching supports pupils to learn effectively and make good progress in relation to their starting points. By the end of Year 11 and Year 13, pupils achieve high-quality qualifications and accreditation and go onto highly appropriate post-18 destinations. The school's extensive provision of co-curricular opportunities helps all pupils develop varied skills and interests which support their broader preparation for adult life.
5. Leaders have reviewed the school's behavioural policy and introduced measures to support improved behaviour. Pupils in the prep school and sixth form behave consistently well and are respectful to other members of the school community. However, the implementation of the behaviour policy in the senior school has not been wholly effective in addressing the behaviour of some boys.
6. Leaders inculcate a sense of social and community responsibility in pupils. Pupils regularly engage in charitable fundraising and volunteer in the local community in line with the school's aim that pupils should be prepared to make a difference in the world. Pupils of all ages are given opportunities to develop their social awareness and self-esteem by taking on leadership and mentoring roles within the school community.
7. Boarding staff promote a warm and inclusive boarding environment where boarders feel respected and form supportive links across year groups. Boarders are effectively supported in their academic studies and in their personal development.
8. Safeguarding is effectively managed. Health and safety and management of risk are given a high priority. A proactive approach to the management of mental health through the provision of wellbeing hubs helps pastoral staff to identify problems at an early stage. Staff are well trained and have appropriate knowledge to carry out their responsibilities. Leaders work closely with, and make appropriate referrals to, external agencies where necessary. Robust safer recruitment processes are in place.

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 the timely and systematic updating of all policies to ensure that they fully reflect the relevant statutory guidance
- ensure the effective and consistent implementation of the school's behavioural policy to address the disrespectful behaviour of some boys in the senior school.

Material change request

9. Inspectors considered the school's request for a change to the details of its registration to increase its age range to three years old. Leaders plan to create a nursery (pre-school) class for up to 21 children aged three to four years old.
10. Thoughtful preparation has been made to develop existing early years provision to incorporate a pre-school class. Leaders have planned a safe, well-resourced and stimulating pre-school environment which will allow children free-flowing access to suitable outdoor learning and play areas.
11. The pre-school curriculum is well designed to create varied and stimulating activities and will be enriched by broader experiences such as swimming and participating in activities in the woodland learning environment.
12. Health and safety throughout the school is well managed. Additional considerations for younger children on site have been well considered.
13. Leaders and staff are experienced and appropriately trained in safeguarding. They demonstrate an awareness of the risks presented by hazards such as choking in younger children and have taken steps to mitigate such risks.
14. It is recommended that the requested material change be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

15. Leaders and governors make decisions in the best interests of pupils. They ensure that they have ongoing capacity to support pupils' wellbeing and academic achievement. They work closely with external agencies to ensure that they receive the right specialist support for pupils who need it. They listen carefully to their pupils, parents and staff to garner their views about the school, and to co-construct future developments in provision. For instance, they have conducted a wide-ranging consultation which has resulted in a refreshed articulation of the school's values, vision and ethos.
16. Leaders actively promote the school's values. Pupils are encouraged and rewarded for displaying the school's values of courage, curiosity, endeavour, integrity and kindness. These values have informed a clear vision for the future development of the school, including plans to develop provision in the early years with a new pre-school to respond to the needs of local families and to further the strategic aims of the school.
17. Leaders evaluate thoroughly what they do well and where they can improve. Leaders with responsibility for teaching and learning in the senior school are enhancing classroom practice. For instance, they evaluate the quality of teaching and learning through regular learning walks which provide feedback to colleagues, helping them to improve their practice. The time invested in staff development has a clear impact on pupils' learning. For example, in the early years where, as a result of training, teachers are using assessment methods which more clearly identify individual targets for development for the youngest children.
18. Governors are appropriately trained so that they have the skills and knowledge necessary for the fulfilment of their roles. Governors maintain close oversight of the school through a well-developed committee structure. Governors meet regularly with senior leaders, receive reports and presentations from school staff, visit boarding houses and use pupil surveys to evaluate the quality of the school's provision so that they can effectively support and challenge the school's leadership team. They ensure that the requirements of the Standards are consistently met.
19. Knowledgeable and well-trained leaders ensure that there is high quality boarding provision, where boarding houses are well maintained and comfortable and run by suitably qualified staff. This creates a welcoming and homely atmosphere within the boarding community which enables boarders to feel safe, grow in confidence and develop independence.
20. Leaders and governors have a detailed and thorough appreciation of risk. Leaders make appropriate risk assessments and considerations, including those related to the school's location and status as a historic building. They have taken action to mitigate any risks, for example, by moving the route of a public footpath. Leaders, including those in the early years, ensure that thorough risk assessments and appropriate staffing ratios enable pupils to access challenging learning experiences on the school site and during off-site activities.
21. Leaders provide parents and external agencies with appropriate information, often through the school website. Leaders fulfil the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and publish a well-considered accessibility plan which ensures that pupils can access all areas of the curriculum. An appropriate complaints policy provides for a three-stage complaints process. Complaints are handled within the timeframe set out in the complaints procedure. Leaders maintain a detailed record of complaints received and the measures taken by the school to respond to them.

22. While school policies are in place, and implemented effectively, the school's safeguarding policy at the time of the inspection did not fully reflect up-to-date statutory guidance. This was not reflective of leaders' high-quality work related to safeguarding, nor the training of leaders and staff. The policy was updated during the inspection.

23. The school fulfils its requirement to provide specific information related to the progress and achievement of individual pupils. For instance, the school maintains regular contact with parents about their children's progress through twice yearly parents' meetings and annual reports. Leaders maintain appropriate links with external agencies including providing the required information to the local authority on the provision, funding and finance for pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

25. Pupils benefit from a broad, inclusive curriculum where programmes of study are well structured and thoughtfully sequenced to progressively develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills over time. Leaders ensure that the curriculum gives pupils important foundational knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders also provide specialist teaching for the youngest pupils in subjects such as music, modern foreign languages, and computing to help them develop a rich early understanding of these subjects. At GCSE, pupils select from a range of subjects in line with their abilities, interests and aspirations. In addition to a broad choice of A levels, many pupils undertake the extended qualification project (EPQ.)
26. Lessons are engaging and imaginative. Teachers use a range of high-quality resources and effective strategies to help pupils develop critical thinking, evaluation, and study skills. For instance, in engineering and design technology, teachers ask pupils to apply their theoretical ideas in practice and present their findings to the class. Teaching is often ambitious, enabling pupils to express their ideas with increasing confidence. For instance, pupils are highly articulate debating about Anglo-Saxon artefacts in Year 5, or in cross-curricular work exploring the local area through geography, art and computing. As they get older, teachers help pupils to really understand the precise learning that they need to fulfil the requirements of their chosen qualifications.
27. The well-planned curriculum in Reception allows children to develop their early understanding and development. Staff focus on communication and language, supporting children to express themselves confidently using a variety of age-appropriate vocabulary. Children develop an early understanding of the use of number, shape and space. The learning environment is well resourced and activities such as handwriting practice, working with chalk, handling balls, modelling in 3D, painting on large canvases and sorting objects develop children's fine and gross motor skills.
28. Teaching provides appropriate support for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). The proficiency of EAL speakers is identified prior to entry and diagnostic tests are employed to determine how their progress can be best supported. Provision is flexible, including in-class strategies, additional language lessons, one-to-one and small group additional support.
29. Leaders ensure that there is well-planned and robust support for pupils who have SEND. In-class support and adaptative teaching methods allow pupils with SEND to learn successfully alongside their peers. Additional targeted interventions are provided when needed and leaders track the impact of this work precisely, through standardised testing and regular reviews.
30. There is an effective assessment framework in place. Leaders use performance information to check the progress that pupils are making. They act quickly to identify and support any pupils who need additional support. As a result of effective planning, teaching and assessment, pupils across the school learn and achieve well. Pupils, from a range of starting points, go on to achieve high-quality qualifications and accreditations, and go onto appropriate post-18 destinations in training, employment and education.
31. Across the school, an extensive programme of house competitions and popular recreation activities, from learning to be a business tycoon to playing dodgeball, stimulates pupils' emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills. In Reception, children develop confidence and social skills through enriching co-curricular activities. For older pupils, pupil-led learning in enrichment activities, like the

Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and debate clubs, fosters independence and maturity. Music, art, and drama give pupils rich opportunities for self-expression and teamwork.

32. The co-curricular programme is appreciated by pupils as a distinctive feature of school life, offering the opportunity to develop skills which are different, but no less valuable, to those developed in academic lessons. Senior school pupils participate in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) and residential visits, so that every pupil has the opportunity to acquire new skills and develop the qualities of resilience and independence which will help prepare them for adult life.
33. Boarding staff provide a happy, informal and homely environment where boarders enjoy a healthy balance between study and social activities. Boarders appreciate the academic support offered by boarding tutors as well as the opportunities to chat with friends, play pool or table tennis in the boarding house. Boarders are often joined by day pupils for popular weekend trips to the cinema, bowling or waterparks.

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

34. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

35. Pupils develop knowledge, skills and confidence through the well-planned and well-taught physical education (PE) curriculum and team sports. Pupils benefit from plentiful opportunities for movement; PE, swimming, outdoor learning, playground games and outdoor pursuits build physical fitness and social confidence. Sports provision makes a significant contribution to pupils' wellbeing throughout the school, with inclusive opportunities and high levels of participation in competitive fixtures.
36. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), including the relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum, is broad and age appropriate. The curriculum is delivered by well-trained teachers who teach important topics such as consent, protected characteristics and digital resilience. Respect and positive, empathetic relationships are promoted throughout the curriculum. Leaders routinely review the curriculum to ensure that they adapt it to include significant contextual local or national issues. Pupil and parent feedback is used to inform the development of the scheme of work so that the content is relevant to the needs of pupils.
37. Leaders implement effective anti-bullying and behaviour strategies and policies. Pupils know the difference between an unkind act and bullying and know how to report it, should it occur. Younger pupils in the prep school behave consistently well. They know how to seek to mend broken relationships but also understand that sometimes an adult may be required for guidance. The behaviour policy is implemented so that the conduct of most pupils in senior school classes is orderly and considerate. However, it is not effective in ensuring that the behaviour of some male pupils in the senior school is consistently appropriate.
38. The curriculum in religious education (RE) provides pupils with an opportunity for reflection and the development of self-knowledge. For instance, younger pupils are encouraged to share personal experiences, discuss unkindness and consider the role of compassion. In addition to their lessons, regular year group chapel services provide a space for pupils to develop their spiritual understanding. The chaplaincy encourages respect for all faiths, while the chapel is made available for all other faiths to use.
39. In the early years, opportunities for child-initiated activity develop children's self-confidence and independence in making choices about their learning. Collaborative role play and shared construction and art projects promote turn taking and self-regulation. Well-established routines within Reception, such as washing and tidying up, encourage children to take increasing responsibility for their environment. A well-designed outdoor play area enables children to become increasingly physically confident. This is further developed in the curriculum through regular and well-planned PE lessons and swimming sessions.
40. Leaders and staff ensure that boarding accommodation is well maintained and a comfortable environment. There is appropriate supervision and boarders are taught how to seek help, should they need it. Boarders' self-reliance is developed through washing their clothes independently in the laundry rooms, making snacks in the kitchens and cleaning up after themselves. Sixth-form boarders act as role models for younger boarders, and enthusiastically take on responsibilities, representing the views of the house to boarding staff.

41. The school complies with required health and safety legislation, including that related to fire risk and precaution. Fire safety management systems are in place, including the completion of fire risk assessments and regular fire evacuation drills, which also include boarders. Pupils are well supervised. The premises are effectively maintained and provide a safe environment for pupils and those who are boarding. Arrangements, including the facilities, for first aid and the medical care of pupils and boarders, are well established. Staff training is regular and up to date, including paediatric first aid training. Records are maintained appropriately.
42. Admission and attendance registers are accurately maintained. Leaders track pupils' attendance and follow up on absences in a timely manner. An effective relationship has been developed with the local authority attendance team. The school notifies the local authority when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition points.

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. Pupils are taught about the importance of contribution to the local community and the value of taking on roles and responsibilities to help others. Pupils work closely with the local area through organising collections for food banks, charitable fundraising, visiting local nursing homes, and collaborative projects with primary schools. In school, pupils take on roles such as sports captains, prefects, librarians, play leaders who support younger pupils, 'eco-leaders' and form captains. The school council uses pupils' feedback to choose charities that the school will support through fundraising, including international charities to support deaf children.
45. Boarders are active participants in the boarding and local community. Boarders are encouraged to respect and celebrate their diverse backgrounds and cultural heritages. Older boarders act as mentors to younger boarders, help them with homework, and take on duties in the boarding house. Boarders attend weekend events as a collaborative community, and engage with enthusiasm in the local celebrations, such as the scarecrow festival.
46. There is an appropriate curriculum that supports pupils' economic education, including learning related to pay, tax, mortgages and pensions. This curriculum is enhanced by wider opportunities across the school. For example, the youngest children learn about the function of money when role playing shops. Pupils develop financial awareness through charitable activities such as prep pupils running stalls at a charities day and older pupils competing to raise the most funds from an initial £5 investment.
47. Through the curriculum, pupils are taught about the importance of respecting people, including those protected by specific characteristics and those of different cultures and faiths. Leaders actively promote inclusion through whole-school displays, in assemblies and through clubs which champion diversity and inclusivity. Whole school events raise the profile of international events among pupils, such as Black History Month. This curriculum is enriched by additional activities such as African drumming workshops, arts week, trips, visits and visiting speakers.
48. Staff support the youngest children's social development. Staff model the behaviours that they want children to learn. Children are taught to develop an understanding of the importance of kindness, sharing, taking turns and taking responsibility for their actions.
49. Leaders and staff actively promote and teach pupils the principles of right and wrong through well-planned and well-taught lessons. Staff reinforce these expectations in daily interactions with pupils. As they get older, pupils learn about the roles of important public bodies, such as the role of Parliament, the police, the judicial system and courts. Visiting speakers, such as a local magistrate, help pupils to understand the role of right and wrong in British society.
50. There is a well-planned careers curriculum in place, which provides pupils with individual tailored guidance, drop-in support, work-related learning, webinars and external speakers. The curriculum provides information about the training, education and employment opportunities available to pupils beyond school. Leaders measure the quality of provision against nationally recognised benchmarks, continually reviewing where they can provide further support for pupils. For instance, they have recently implemented a new online platform to improve how some pupils can access

careers information. Pupils are well supported to make informed decisions about their future pathways and careers.

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

51. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

52. Leaders are knowledgeable and skilled in their safeguarding roles. They ensure that there are appropriate policies and protocols that are well understood and adhered to by staff. There was an omission in the school's most recent safeguarding policy at the start of the inspection, which were not reflective of the high-quality safeguarding work undertaken by leaders. This minor omission in the administration of the policy was rectified before the end of the inspection.

53. Governors quality assure the work of leaders through a range of activity, including on-site visits, review of documentation and by speaking with pupils. Governors seek external specialist expertise to ensure that they are taking all reasonable action to keep pupils safe. They use this guidance to act to address any recommendations. They invest in ensuring that there is sufficient leadership capacity to provide sufficient oversight of pupils' safeguarding needs.

54. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including online, and how to report any concerns. Online safety is embedded through the PSHE curriculum and reinforced in other lessons, assemblies and form time. Pupils learn about online safety, 'scams', privacy and recognising unhealthy online relationships. They are taught about the importance of critically evaluating online sources for potential bias and misinformation. RSE teaching reinforces body privacy and respect, equipping children with practical strategies to stay safe.

55. Boarding staff are well trained in the specific safeguarding requirements related to boarding. Staff use a variety of ways to check on the safety and wellbeing of boarders. Evening meetings and regular check-ins regularly monitor boarders' emotional and physical safety. Boarders know how to report concerns, including reporting to boarding staff and online sources of support. The role of the independent listener is well understood by boarders and well advertised by leaders.

56. Staff are well trained in their collective responsibility to safeguard pupils. They receive regular training and updates which help to embed their understanding and improve their vigilance to any signs of concern about a pupil. Specific training in areas such as the 'Prevent' duty, online safety and mental health is well established, with specialist staff delivering key content. Staff consistently use the school's chosen online platform to record concerns, including low-level concerns.

57. Leaders ensure that all concerns are handled in a timely and effective way. School leaders work effectively with relevant external agencies, including the local authority children's services team and the local authority designated officer, when needed. Leaders implement any advice received promptly and sensitively. Safeguarding leaders meet regularly to review safeguarding referrals, to ensure that pupils have appropriate ongoing care and support and to identify any trends in safeguarding information that need further consideration.

58. Leaders and governors ensure that all required pre-employment checks are made on adults before they work with pupils, including those who work with the youngest children and those who provide supervision for boarding. The information related to these checks is suitably maintained on a single central record and in staff files.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Kimbolton School
Department for Education number	873/6012
Registered charity number	1098586
Address	Kimbolton School Kimbolton Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE28 0EA
Phone number	01480 860505
Email address	reception@kimboltonschool.com
Website	https://kimboltonschool.com
Proprietor	Kimbolton School
Chair	Mr Jonathan Gray
Headteacher	Mr Will Chuter
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	1020
Number of boarding pupils	34
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 June, 2022

Information about the school

60. Kimbolton School is a co-educational independent day and boarding school for pupils aged 4 to 18 years old. It is a registered charity where trustees also take on the role of the governing body. There has been a change of headteacher since the previous inspection.
61. The senior school and sixth form, for pupils aged 11 to 18 years old, are based at Kimbolton Castle. The preparatory school, for pupils aged four to 11 years old, is located on a site half a mile from the senior school.
62. There are two single-sex boarding houses, Kimbolton House and White House, located in the village adjacent to the school site. These boarding houses provide for pupils from Year 7. The school provides flexible boarding options for pupils in addition to weekly and full boarding.
63. The school has applied to the DfE to make a material change to the school's registration agreement, so that the school may admit three-year-olds from January 2026. This request was considered as part of this inspection.
64. There are 27 pupils in the early years comprising two Reception classes.
65. The school has identified 150 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
66. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for 41 pupils.
67. The school states its aims are to deliver an outstanding, modern all-round education that challenges children to become curious, courageous and kind young adults with a strong moral compass, able to make a difference to the world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	23 to 25 September 2025
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68. A team of 11 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

69. 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
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

70. 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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For more information, please visit isi.net