

School inspection report

1 to 3 April 2025

The King Alfred School

Manor Wood
149 North End Road
London
NW11 7HY

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 and leaders have the knowledge, skills and understanding required to fulfil their roles effectively. Pupils' academic, physical, and emotional wellbeing is well promoted. Leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of The King Alfred School's distinctive educational approach. They implement the school's offer with consistency and purpose. This approach underpins pupils' well-developed emotional intelligence and social awareness. Within the nurturing, close-knit school community, pupils feel empowered to express themselves freely. As a result, they grow into confident, self-aware young people.
2. Pupils are at the heart of leaders' decision-making. The curriculum is both challenging and engaging. It supports learning effectively through innovative approaches reflecting the school's aim to provide a broad educational experience. Alongside GCSEs and A levels, the school offers a range of school directed courses (SDCs). Leaders have developed these to provide pupils with contemporary learning opportunities. These courses are assessed internally, with external checks to ensure consistency.
3. Pupils work in close collaboration with their teachers. They rise to the challenges and high expectations the school sets. Pupils are usually well focused, motivated and purposeful learners. Most are well behaved and deeply respectful of one another's views. They value the opportunities to work collaboratively on projects and research tasks. They achieve well overall across subjects, including in public examinations.
4. Effective teaching and well-planned lessons ensure that pupils' academic learning needs are met. This includes for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL).
5. Pupils' pastoral needs are met through effective behaviour management and strong support for their physical and mental wellbeing. In line with the school's ethos, governors and leaders consult regularly with pupils to ensure that the school's provision aligns with their needs.
6. The importance of diversity and inclusion is threaded through the school's values. These values are well understood by pupils and parents. They are embedded in school life from the early years onwards. The school's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) group, leads pupils in showing tolerance, respect, and care for their peers. Pupils recognise their responsibilities towards others in a global society. They support groups and charities within the local community well.
7. Pupils are suitably prepared for life beyond school. Activities in the lower school, include, for example, presentations about different jobs and professions from visiting speakers. The careers programme in the sixth form, incorporates a comprehensive programme of careers guidance events. However, careers guidance for younger pupils in the upper school is not so well developed. The information provided about the potential careers available to them is limited.
8. The robust safeguarding culture is embedded throughout the school, including in the early years. Pupils learn about keeping safe, for example, when online. They have ready access to effective support systems. Where necessary, there is prompt communication with external agencies offering guidance and support. Robust procedures are in place for the safer recruitment of staff.
9. Health and safety, including fire safety arrangements, are well managed through the appropriate maintenance of premises and equipment. Protocols for the oversight of risk assessments are

effective. However, while pupil safety is not compromised, some assessments relating to access to higher risk areas on the school site vary in detail and quality compared to others.

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:

- strengthen careers guidance further for younger pupils in the upper school so that they are routinely well informed about the potential careers available to them
- ensure that the detail recorded in risk assessments is of equal quality and consistency for all risks identified, externally and across the school site.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors demonstrate a deep understanding of, and commitment to, the school's continuous improvement. Many governors are current or former parents. They act as custodians of the school's distinctive aims and ethos, which focus on pupils' personal development as well as their academic achievements. Governors and leaders promote pupils' wellbeing. They create an inclusive environment which celebrates diversity and equality for all. As a result, pupils are respectful and appreciative of individual differences.
11. The curriculum and pastoral systems foster a learning environment in which pupils share a strong sense of belonging. Leaders remain highly visible and compassionate. They create a culture where pupils feel confident to express their views. Sixth-form pupils act as a conduit between leaders and the wider pupil body. Leaders gather pupils' feedback regularly through school council discussions and surveys. They use pupils' perspectives to inform strategic planning, including to support ongoing curriculum development. Pupils also contribute to wider decision-making processes, for example, by helping to select new school caterers.
12. Governors know the school well. As parents, many are on the school site daily. They maintain regular contact through meetings and speaking with school staff and pupils. Detailed reports allow them to scrutinise survey feedback from pupils and parents. They use this information to challenge leaders appropriately and to monitor the impact of leaders' decisions. Governors check that leaders have the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles effectively and so ensure that the Standards are met consistently.
13. Relevant information is readily available to parents through the school's website. Leaders oversee the provision of informative reports that keep parents and carers well informed about their children's progress. Reports include clear guidance on how pupils can continue to improve their progress. Leaders provide the local authority with the required information about the use of funding for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
14. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders take effective actions to make the curriculum accessible for any pupils who have SEND through the school's accessibility plan. They ensure that no groups of pupils are discriminated against by any aspect of the school's provision.
15. Leaders in the early years ensure that staff deliver a well-balanced curriculum. The development of children's speech, language and communication is prioritised in adult-child interaction. Staff are offered an appropriate balance of challenge and support to promote their continuous professional development.
16. Leaders follow the school's complaints procedure effectively. They work to reach informal resolutions when concerns arise. On the rare occasion when a formal complaint is received, they reflect on how best to address the issue and to prevent similar concerns in the future. Governors maintain a clear and effective overview of the complaints process.
17. School leaders understand and mitigate against any risks identified. The school ethos encourages pupils to manage risks safely. Appropriate safety measures are in place. Risk assessments are routinely reviewed and updated. Pupils are safe. Protocols for overseeing risk assessments related to access to higher-risk areas, such as the forge, are applied. However, the detail and quality of these assessments are sometimes less consistent than those of other risk assessments across the school.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. The well-considered curriculum is successful in combining pupils' academic and personal development. Pupils gain the knowledge and skills to thrive at school and beyond. The school's offer is broad and balanced, including in sports and creative subjects. Programmes are well planned. Regular reviews ensure that programme content is age-appropriate and continues to meet pupils' needs, including for pupils who have SEND and those pupils who speak EAL.
20. In the upper school, pupils learn through exploratory projects across a range of subjects, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), or English, history and art (Liberal Arts), to address a compelling question or real-world problem. Pupils present their findings confidently at conferences attended by parents and teachers. In doing so, they evaluate their own progress and explain their learning, while demonstrating advanced levels of oracy. Pupils are taught mathematics, English, science, music, languages, physical education (PE) and drama separately alongside the range of projects.
21. Pupils have access to a broad range of subjects at both GCSE and A level, as well as several school-directed courses (SDCs), such as 'Global Challenges', assessed through the completion of a higher project qualification (HPQ).
22. In the lower school, teachers use skilful questioning to encourage pupils to think deeply and to embrace the challenges set. Staff build positive relationships with pupils, understand pupils' individual needs, and adapt learning to build on their prior achievement. As a result, pupils are enthusiastic to learn and show genuine joy in their accomplishments.
23. In the early years activities are designed to suit children's needs and different stages of their development. Curiosity and creativity are promoted well as children are encouraged to play, explore and discover for themselves. Children develop their communication and language skills through positive interactions with staff. They enjoy learning to read, listen to stories attentively and respond to adult's questions with enthusiasm. Adventurous play opportunities outside the classroom support children to develop physically, socially and emotionally.
24. The aesthetic and creative aspects of the school's curriculum are well developed. Pupils regularly take part in drama and music performances. Large-scale opportunities such as 'Kastonbury' bring pupils of all ages together to share their creative talents. The highly successful Level 3 Extended Diploma in Performing and Production Arts is offered for sixth-form pupils aiming to pursue performing arts at specialist higher education institutions.
25. Teachers across the school have strong subject knowledge. They use this well to plan learning which encourages pupils, for example, to develop a sense of curiosity and to be adventurous learners. Positive relationships between teachers and pupils foster an environment in which pupils feel confident to ask for help when they need it. Teachers respond with patience and support. Typically, activities and teaching strategies are appropriately matched to pupils' needs. However, occasionally, pupils who could achieve more are not moved on quickly enough to the next stage. Overall, most pupils achieve well.
26. Effective checks on learning track pupils' attainment and progress. Consequently, teachers identify where additional support is needed quickly. Pupils use the help offered to improve their work.

27. Pupils who have SEND receive tailored support, so they make good progress alongside their peers. In the lower school, individual plans and support strategies, including effective use of teaching assistants, address pupils' specific needs appropriately. These strategies are monitored carefully to ensure that they are working. In the upper school, pupils who have SEND achieve in line with their peers in public examinations.
28. Pupils who speak EAL are assessed and supported so that their needs are met. A small number of pupils receive additional help in lessons from teaching assistants who work alongside teachers.
29. Pupils across the school benefit from a wide variety of co-curricular activities, which offer them the freedom to explore interests and develop new skills and passions, such as cheerleading in the lower school and blacksmithing in the upper school.

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

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

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

31. Relationships between pupils and with staff are positive across the school. These relationships remove barriers and encourage open dialogue. Strong pastoral care is a priority. Pupils feel confident seeking support, knowing they are taken seriously as individuals. A respectful informality and minimal rules foster independence, self-esteem, and a strong sense of self-worth. As a result, pupils feel respected, value their place in the school community, and show respect for one another.
32. Leaders create an environment in which pupils celebrate all faiths and backgrounds. Regular assemblies encourage reflection on contemporary events, developing pupils' moral sensibilities and spiritual awareness. An external charity, for example, presented impartially to upper school pupils on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This guided them to move beyond partisan views and instead focus on seeking solutions that prioritise the humanity of those affected.
33. Leaders have designed a comprehensive curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. This also covers the statutory requirement for relationships and sex education (RSE). The programme is taught by trained staff. Well-planned learning raises pupils' awareness of age-appropriate issues. Pupils in the lower school, for example, can describe what respect looks like to them. In the upper school, pupils discuss drugs and the law sensibly with the help of visiting police officers. Pupils are knowledgeable about the importance of consent and the typical signs and symptoms of healthy and unhealthy relationships.
34. Pupils build self-confidence and self-esteem through performance opportunities. In the lower school, they enjoy drama lessons from the Reception class onwards as they develop their communication skills through regular performances. In Year 9, all pupils develop their skills in public speaking through undertaking a formal London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) qualification. Pupils are encouraged to be adventurous in their learning. They feel comfortable to do so because of the support they receive, even if they encounter difficulties or make mistakes.
35. The school has a dedicated counsellor who is available to pupils of all ages to support their emotional and mental health. Sixth-form pupils are trained as peer listeners. They offer wellbeing support for Year 7 pupils. In this role, they develop their own leadership and communication skills while making sensitive topics more relatable to younger pupils. Senior leaders regularly monitor pupils' wellbeing through surveys and detailed reporting from staff across the school.
36. Leaders with responsibility for physical education (PE) have developed a broad programme of activities. This uses facilities, both on and off the school site, effectively. Pupils of all ages participate in a range of team sports, including football and netball. They can also learn to sail in boats designed and built at the school.
37. Positive relationships between pupils and staff, supported by the consistent implementation of the school's behaviour policy, ensure that pupils of all ages behave well. This contributes to a strong sense of shared purpose across the school. All behaviour incidents are systematically recorded. Leaders review these records regularly to identify patterns and take timely action when needed. Incidents of bullying are rare. If they do occur, staff respond swiftly and appropriately.

38. In Year 8, pupils take part in a project, known as the Village, designed to develop their social skills, independence, creativity, and perseverance. They also foster a deeper connection with the environment, for example, as they spend a week living together in self-constructed dwellings on the school site.
39. Leaders ensure that pupils are supervised throughout the day, including through effective deployment of sufficient staff during breaktimes. Appropriate staff-to-child ratios are in place at all times in the early years.
40. The school premises are well maintained. Leaders implement an effective maintenance schedule, covering areas such as water testing, fire prevention and firefighting equipment. Pupils know what to do if the fire alarm sounds because of the regular drills.
41. Suitably trained staff provide comprehensive first aid and medical support for pupils. The necessary procedures for dispensing medication are followed. Staff working with children in the Reception class are trained in paediatric first aid.
42. Pupils' attendance is well managed. Appropriate attendance and admission registers are maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders set clear expectations. They follow the school's established procedures to continue to promote high levels of attendance. When pastoral concerns affect a pupil's attendance, staff implement tailored support plans. Leaders inform the local authority whenever pupils join or leave at non-standard times of transition.

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. PSHE lessons, assemblies and other activities, including talks by Old Alfredians, parents and other external speakers, are effective in teaching pupils of all ages about public services and values such as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect. Children in the early years learn about Passover, for example, through visits from parents who share their traditions. In the upper school, pupils and staff create class contracts that foster mutual respect for individual differences. Pupils deepen their understanding of democracy in action through initiatives such as mock elections and involvement in the school council. Sixth-form pupils meet regularly with governors. Pupils' contributions are valued as an important part of informing strategic planning for the school's future.
45. The work of the DEIB group forms an integral part of the curriculum. The group strengthens pupils' understanding of, and respect for, different cultures and backgrounds. Pupils confidently present their research and findings to parents and governors during the termly DEIB forums. Mutual respect is one of the school's guiding principles. This focus on respect is actively promoted by both pupil and staff leaders. It is evident in all aspects of school life. A strong sense of belonging is reflected in pupils' attitudes towards one another. They are encouraged to listen attentively to others' views and to remain open to learning from all members of the school community. Opportunities for play, collaborative learning, and meaningful interactions with adults, both in the classroom and during breaktimes, enable children in the early years to develop strong social and interpersonal skills.
46. Pupils demonstrate a highly developed sense of right and wrong. Although school rules are few, the core philosophy, of being kind, aware, and safe, is consistently reinforced through PSHE lessons and assemblies. These sessions encourage pupils to reflect on their behaviour. When, occasionally, behaviour concerns arise, pupils respond thoughtfully and engage positively with staff. Restorative approaches are applied skilfully. This transforms these moments into meaningful learning experiences.
47. The school aims to empower pupils to make a positive difference in the world. This work is promoted well through pupils' access to a wide range of volunteering opportunities within the local community and beyond. These experiences help pupils to develop a strong sense of moral responsibility and a commitment to helping others. The school's 'Six' group leads a variety of lunchtime and after-school clubs and activities to support younger pupils. In the upper school, pupils of all ages regularly volunteer in the local area, for instance helping in the local food bank and supporting the work of a local special needs school. Older pupils participate in a volunteer project in Namibia, where they contribute to the work of a local school. These opportunities allow pupils to develop leadership and safeguarding skills, while gaining a broader understanding of the world around them.
48. Pupils in the sixth form are provided with impartial careers advice and guidance. This includes the 'Life after KAS' conference. In this event, pupils learn about gap years, paths into employment, apprenticeships and university admissions in the UK and abroad. An extensive range of work experience opportunities is offered to prepare pupils for life after school. Pupils benefit from the expertise of parents and Old Alfredians, alongside opportunities from local and national companies. Pupils appreciate the subject-specific support offered through the super-curricular programme. This includes tailored advice for those applying to competitive and specialist higher education courses.

However, the careers guidance for pupils in Year 7 to Year 9 does not inform them consistently well about possible career options, or about the careers support available to them.

49. Economic education is embedded across the curriculum throughout the school. In the lower school, pupils take part in a French café experience. In doing so, they develop their language skills while gaining an early understanding of the value of money as they purchase items from the menu. In the upper school, the 'Choice' programme introduces pupils to key financial concepts, including money management and the use of bank accounts. Sixth-form pupils receive additional guidance on finances from an external provider. This helps them to set and manage a budget in preparation for university life.

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

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

Safeguarding

51. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are secure in their knowledge of the local and national safeguarding context. They work effectively with external agencies who provide guidance and support. Safeguarding arrangements, including those relating to online safety, are robust and effective. Staff receive regular safeguarding training, including through monthly updates. These are adapted to reflect any local contextual risks and school needs. Staff are aware of and understand their shared safeguarding responsibilities appropriately.
52. Effective safeguarding ensures that pupils' welfare is promoted and secured in line with statutory guidance. Leaders remain alert to contextual risks to pupils, including through attending local and national training courses. A governor with specific responsibility for safeguarding meets regularly with the designated safeguarding lead. Together, they reflect on and support any further refinements needed to safeguarding practices at the school. The regular reviews ensure that the school's safeguarding policies, including those regarding filtering and monitoring of internet use, are implemented effectively.
53. A strong culture of safeguarding permeates the school. Staff play their part in supporting this appropriately. Regular safeguarding updates, along with clear policies and procedures, ensure that staff understand what to do if they have a concern. Consequently, worries about any pupil who may be at risk of harm are reported promptly to the safeguarding team. Concerns and actions taken are carefully recorded in detail on the school's system. This ensures that any member of the safeguarding team is ready to support pupils at any time, including during holidays, school trips, and camps.
54. Safeguarding leaders understand pupils' needs, including through the regular surveys and the open communication channels established through the school. Pupils are confident to report concerns to staff members. Leaders respond effectively to any welfare issues that may arise through the range of age-appropriate avenues for pupils to disclose any worries.
55. Pupils are taught effectively about personal safety, including about online risks. Online safety sessions are offered to parents as additional support. Appropriate school-based network filtering and monitoring systems are in place. Safeguarding leaders scrutinise reports carefully and respond to concerns promptly.
56. Staff responsible for the school's recruitment processes implement statutory expectations rigorously. All the required checks are completed before adults begin employment or volunteering at the school. These are recorded accurately on the school's single central record.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	The King Alfred School
Department for Education number	302/6004
Registered charity number	312590
Address	The King Alfred School Manor Wood 149 North East Road London NW11 7HY
Phone number	020 8457 5200
Email address	kas@kingalfred.org.uk
Website	www.kingalfred.org.uk
Proprietor	The King Alfred School Society
Chair	Mrs Sam Jukes-Adams
Headteacher	Mr Robert Lobatto
Age range	4 – 18
Number of pupils	716
Date of previous inspection	22 to 25 March 2022

Information about the school

58. The King Alfred School is a co-educational day school for pupils situated on the edge of Hampstead Heath in north west London. It was founded by parents as a 'rational' school in 1898 with the belief that pupils should be educated in a secular environment that encouraged learning for its own sake. The school occupies two sites that are immediately across the road from one another. It is owned by the King Alfred School Society and run as a charitable trust, administered by a board of governors known as the Council, whose members are drawn from the Society and are parents of current or former pupils. Since the previous inspection, the school has grown in numbers to over 700 pupils and introduced project-based enquiry learning into part of the curriculum.
59. The school has identified 268 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Seven pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
60. The school has identified English as an additional language for 112 pupils.
61. The school states its aims are to maximise the potential of each pupil by providing an outstanding holistic education. It seeks to provide a rigorous and inspiring academic experience and pays high regard to the authentic personal development of each pupil. A distinctive feature is the school's informality, typified by the absence of school uniform, the use of first names, and the lack of unnecessary pressure, which facilitates a nurturing community in which all members have an important voice.
62. The school is currently operating outside of their registration as they are educating a very small number of 19-year-old-pupils.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

1 to 3 April 2025

63. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The onsite inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

64. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

65. 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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