

School inspection report

4 to 6 November 2025

Channing School

The Bank

Highgate

London

N6 5HF

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'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	4
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	5
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	6
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	7
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	8
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	9
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	10
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	11
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	12
SAFEGUARDING	13
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	13
SCHOOL DETAILS	14
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	15
INSPECTION DETAILS	16

Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors have ensured that leaders have the relevant skills to carry out their roles and to ensure that the requirements of the Standards are met consistently. Governors regularly visit the school to scrutinise records, meet with staff and pupils and observe a range of school activities. The governing board receives comprehensive reports on aspects of school life, enabling them to have detailed and effective oversight of the school.
2. Knowledgeable leaders ensure the effective daily and strategic running of the school. For example, they have a robust approach to risk management, ensuring that suitable risk assessments are in place to mitigate any risk to pupils that may affect their welfare, health and safety. Leaders ensure that the required policies and procedures are in place. These are known by staff and followed appropriately. However, the attendance policy was not up to date at the beginning of the inspection and did not reflect the effective practice in the school. This was rectified during the inspection.
3. Leaders successfully implement a consistent approach to the curriculum and teaching across the junior and senior schools. Pupils learn and achieve well, including in public examinations at the end of Years 11 and 13. Leaders have amended their approach to gathering and tracking assessment information. Leaders' analysis and evaluation of this information is developed in the junior school and leaders have begun to identify areas for improvement within the senior school. However, the use of this assessment information is not yet consistent across departments, and this leads to opportunities being missed that could better support some pupils' progress.
4. The curriculum is delivered well by knowledgeable teachers who foster a love of learning among pupils. Teaching is effective and meets the needs of pupils. Teachers nurture pupils' eagerness to learn and equip them to embrace academic challenge. The digital strategy across the school enhances pupils' learning experiences, enabling them to use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively across the curriculum and in their independent study.
5. Well-planned pastoral care and opportunities for pupils to develop their personal and social skills nurture pupils' self-awareness and self-esteem. Pupils are taught the importance of looking after their physical and mental health and are supported well by staff to do so. Pupils behave well in and out of lessons, demonstrate kindness and model mutual respect for all. The buildings and premises are well maintained. Watchful and caring staff supervise pupils appropriately at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
6. Leaders actively prepare pupils for the future in line with the aims of the school and British values. Pupils develop an understanding of important topics such as democracy, differentiating right from wrong and equality. They are taught about the importance of respect and are considerate of others while expressing their own opinions. They take active roles in contributing to the local community.
7. In the early years, effective teaching and nurturing help children to develop self-confidence and self-esteem, and this has a positive impact on their wellbeing. Staff deploy a range of carefully planned activities that encourage children to express their feelings and emotions. These interactions build their self-awareness and help them to develop their social, communication and early reading skills.
8. Leaders prioritise pupils' safety. Safeguarding is managed well throughout the school. Leaders and staff receive suitable and regular safeguarding training. They are vigilant and take prompt action to address concerns when they arise.

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 attendance policy reflects the most up-to-date statutory guidance and the effective practice in the school
- ensure that tracking and assessment information is used consistently across all departments in the senior school to support pupils' progress.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Governors and leaders use their experience and knowledge to make effective strategic decisions which actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils. Leaders work closely together to successfully embed a whole-school approach and ethos, which is then adapted in an age-appropriate way throughout the school. As a result, pupils' wellbeing is prioritised as they transition through the school. They receive a well-planned and coherent educational experience.
10. Governors are knowledgeable about the school. Consequently, they provide suitable oversight, challenge and support for leaders. Leaders and governors work closely together to steer the school's strategic direction. They check that policies and procedures are reviewed and implemented effectively and that the Standards are met consistently. The oversight of governors is thorough and effective.
11. Leaders monitor the experience of the youngest children effectively to ensure that children's wellbeing, learning and development are well supported. Highly skilled teachers and teaching assistants deliver engaging activities that enthuse children in their learning and play. Leaders are diligent in ensuring that children have a range of opportunities in well-equipped areas both indoors and outside. As a result, children settle and progress in a secure and purposeful environment within an atmosphere of happy engagement.
12. Parents receive suitable and regular informative reports about pupils' achievement and progress. Leaders ensure that other appropriate information is provided to parents and external agencies, often through the school website. There are a range of policies in place that are in line with current statutory guidance. These policies are routinely reviewed. However, the attendance policy was not in line with the most up-to-date statutory guidance. This was not reflective of leaders' high-quality practice in the school. The policy was updated during the inspection.
13. Leaders and governors fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, ensuring that an accessibility plan is in place, and is suitable. This ensures that pupils can access the school and curriculum fully. Where needed, leaders and governors enable reasonable adjustments and adaptations.
14. A clear and effective complaints procedure is in place. When complaints occur, leaders follow the policy closely, and records are kept appropriately. Through reviews of both formal and informal complaints, leaders reflect on opportunities for improvement.
15. Leaders and governors have a well-established and embedded risk management process. They identify possible risks across all areas of the school's work and ensure that effective measures are put in place to mitigate them. Suitable risk assessments are in place related to the curriculum, the site, off-site activities and individual pupils. Risk assessments are reviewed regularly and help leaders to ensure that all reasonable action is taken. Leaders and governors regularly consider all contextual matters, local and national, as part of their risk management process.
16. Leaders maintain partnerships with local schools and community events in order to enrich pupils' experiences through the 'social impact' programme. Leaders work closely with relevant external agencies and professionals to provide effective support for pupils' safeguarding and emotional needs. They liaise with appropriate local authorities to access guidance and training and inform their decision-making.

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. Pupils are provided with a broad and balanced curriculum that is appropriate to their ages and aptitudes. The curriculum is designed to foster pupils' intellectual curiosity and a broad range of skills from an early age. This starts with the youngest pupils, who study subjects such as design and technology (DT) and languages, and spend dedicated time in the woodland learning environment, in addition to their core subjects. The oldest pupils study a range of subjects and choose from a selection of GCSE and A-Level options, including multiple modern foreign languages and an array of creative subjects. The curriculum is enhanced through leaders' selection of a range of well-chosen guest speakers and attendance at conferences to enrich their knowledge and skills.
19. Lessons are planned and taught well by skilful teachers who are knowledgeable about the subjects that they teach. Teachers provide pupils with a broad range activities that are well chosen and effective in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils, when they are ready, are encouraged to become independent learners and apply their learning in more complex ways. Pupils are intellectually curious, asking thoughtful questions to extend their knowledge. Teachers plan lessons that use technology to enhance pupils' learning.
20. Staff in the early years implement a well-planned curriculum that is well resourced in the indoor and outdoor environment. Staff develop children's communication and encourage children to develop their early mark-making as a form of written communication. They learn phonic sounds to enable them to be ready to read and write simple sentences. Children's understanding of number, shape and space is developed, as demonstrated by their ability to talk about different weights and sizes when playing with objects. Children learn and develop effectively and are well prepared and ready to move on to Year 1.
21. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported effectively. Pupils' different needs are accurately identified. Regular review of pupils' learning and development ensures that staff are provided with up-to-date information to support their planning. Staff collectively develop strategies and resources to support pupils to access the curriculum successfully. Where needed, teachers teach important knowledge in small steps. Over time, pupils who have SEND learn effectively and achieve well.
22. There are a small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and are in the early stages of learning English. When this occurs, pupils are supported effectively to develop their linguistic understanding and use of English. This support is provided in lessons and in additional sessions where needed. Pupils who speak EAL acquire appropriate linguistic skills, learn the curriculum effectively, and achieve well over time.
23. Pupils learn and achieve well over time and have highly positive attitudes to their learning. This starts with the youngest children and pupils, who develop foundational knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. The oldest pupils in Years 11 and 13 achieve well, and successfully move on to appropriate destinations in education, training and employment.
24. Leaders use an appropriate assessment framework to track and monitor pupils' progress to identify where pupils need more help and to improve academic outcomes. Leaders have recently made changes to their approaches to this assessment system. This tracking is not yet consistently used by

all departments in the senior school. Some leaders are not using assessment information precisely and effectively to identify and support pupils to make the progress of which they are capable.

25. Pupils enjoy a wide range of cross-curricular and recreational activities. Across the school, pupils are encouraged to explore and acquire new interests and enthusiasms, and they gain self-confidence in doing so. Pupils engage in a variety of activities, ranging from instrumental lessons, junior enterprise projects, backstage work in the theatre and dissection club. Leaders check participation rates carefully to ensure different groups of pupils are gaining the most from the experiences on offer. Pupils in the sixth form benefit from an extensive visiting speaker programme, as well as conferences and assemblies on a range of subjects and celebrations of key events such as Black History Month.

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 are taught a range of strategies to navigate their own mental and emotional wellbeing, such as developing techniques for coping with stress. Pupils' wellbeing is promoted through the school's aims, which teach pupils about the importance of respect and kindness. The curriculum teaches pupils about how to support and manage their own mental wellbeing. Where needed, pupils can access additional support through the school's counselling team.
28. Leaders have established appropriate policies and procedures related to behaviour and anti-bullying. They promote a positive approach to managing behaviour, supporting pupils to talk about issues and resolve problems through discussion. Teachers are positive role models that promote mutual respect and thoughtful behaviour. The school's anti-bullying approach is proactive and pupil-led, with the 'Channing promise' and through commercial programmes and the school-designed 'big sibling' approach, forming a central part of the school's strategy. Leaders prioritise early intervention and targeted support for pupils who need it. As a result, pupils conduct themselves with courtesy, politeness and respect. Incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are dealt with effectively on the few occasions that they occur.
29. Leaders fulfil their health and safety responsibilities, including those relating to fire safety. Well-trained staff ensure that learning environments are safe and well-maintained places where pupils benefit from calm, orderly, and secure surroundings. Arrangements related to first aid and the medical treatment of pupils are appropriate. Staff supervise pupils appropriately during all on-site and off-site activities.
30. Leaders have implemented an appropriate physical education (PE) curriculum that challenges pupils and teaches them about the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Pupils are taught about a range of sports and fitness activities. Pupils learn, for example, how to use the school fitness suite and equipment safely and how to develop exercise programmes to promote health. Teachers provide pupils with a positive and fun approach to their delivery of PE which encourages pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and personal health within a safe and supportive environment.
31. Children in the early years learn how to understand and manage their emotional responses. Through the curriculum, teachers teach children how to recognise and anticipate how their feelings might change and how they can support the wellbeing of others. Teachers plan activities which promote the development of children's confidence and independence, including in their ability to communicate their views and worries. Teachers use a range of ways to develop children's physical skills, including opportunities to develop their gross motor skills in areas such as crawling, jumping, running, stretching, throwing and catching.
32. Leaders have developed a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum, which includes statutory coverage of relationships and sex education (RSE). Teachers ensure that pupils are taught about important topics, such as healthy relationships, mental health and consent. Teachers check regularly that the content of the PSHE curriculum is understood and useful to pupils. Leaders and managers monitor the programme's effectiveness. Pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of the topics that they are taught.

33. Admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with regulations. Staff successfully promote high attendance, following up on any absences that occur. They liaise with appropriate agencies about any wider concerns related to pupils' attendance. They inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points. However, the attendance policy was not aligned with the most up-to-date statutory guidance and did not reflect the high-quality practice in the school. This policy was updated during the inspection.

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

34. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

35. The school's culture, reflected in the 'Channing promise', encourages mutual respect and is introduced to pupils in an age-appropriate way. For example, younger pupils learn that not all people are the same and about the importance of treating everyone as they would like to be treated themselves. Older pupils in the senior school discuss and develop their understanding of different aspects of diversity, such as racial heritage and prejudice, and issues affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. The school provides an array of clubs and societies, such as the 'roots and wings' club, to further enhance pupils' understanding.
36. Pupils are active participants in the school's social impact programme which helps them to find ways to contribute to the local community and wider society. Many of these activities are very popular and over-subscribed, such as the Highgate village activities. Pupils also volunteer at breakfast clubs, read to and mentor pupils at other local schools and volunteer for the school's 'communiTEA' programme to help members of the local community.
37. Leaders provide pupils with a well-planned array of opportunities to develop their economic awareness. Activities in the early years help the youngest children to learn the basic functions of money as they work out transactions in the role-play shop, or type numbers into a cash register. As they get older, the programme develops in complexity. For example, Year 6 pupils' involvement in their junior entrepreneurs' fair provides them with the opportunity to design, market and produce items such as key rings, which are then sold to other pupils.
38. Through PSHE lessons and the academic enrichment programme, pupils study contemporary political ideas and issues, such as the welfare state, the role of the police and health services and the changing role of education in society. Teachers also arrange a wide range of assemblies and visiting speakers, so that pupils learn about issues such as criminal law and the prison service. Pupils communicate their ideas about such themes through creative presentations, well-argued papers and debate. Teachers ensure that pupils consider and respect a breadth of viewpoints.
39. The promotion of British values is interwoven into the school curriculum. The school teaches pupils about topics such as individual liberty and that no individual is more worthy than another. Pupils are taught regularly about respect for the democratic process and the rule of law through assemblies, council elections, PSHE lessons and the academic curriculum. The democratic element of the prefect selection process is a vibrant reflection of the democratic process that pupils experience in a first-hand way.
40. Through play and a comprehensive programme of activities, children in the early years develop socially and increasingly accept responsibility when they make mistakes. They learn to listen carefully to each other's views and support each other when, for example, clearing up the outdoor play area. Children begin to understand the importance of democracy and turn-taking in their lives by, for example, voting for their choice of stories or which play area they would like to use.
41. Pupils receive helpful and impartial guidance from staff about a range of careers available to them. This includes specific individual advice about subject choices and possible future careers. The guidance that pupils receive is varied and practical. The provision includes day visits, summer enrichment weeks and work experience opportunities. The careers programme makes extensive use

of external sources of support and guidance to complement the school's access to experts across a wide variety of industries, including alumni, to inspire current pupils. Older pupils are given bespoke advice related to a range of education, training and employment opportunities, including through higher education days and education and training taster events.

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

42. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

43. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are well trained, including in the 'Prevent' duty. They ensure that there is a suitable safeguarding policy that reflects the most recent legal guidance and that associated processes are in place to safeguard pupils effectively. Regular governor oversight of leaders' work offers effective challenge and helpful advice for the safeguarding team. The decision to expand the designated safeguarding team continues to add further capacity to provide precise oversight of safeguarding matters. Collectively, leaders and governors ensure that there is an effective safeguarding culture throughout the school.
44. Leaders use robust systems to record, monitor and assess safeguarding concerns. Records are detailed and any incidents or concerns are dealt with effectively. Leaders liaise effectively with external agencies, when needed, including children's services teams and mental health specialists. Leaders and governors constantly review how they could be more effective in supporting pupils. For example, they routinely review their records of concern to identify any trends or patterns that they need to act upon. They use an array of ways to gather pupils' views so that they can be vigilant to any areas of emerging concern.
45. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained in their responsibilities related to safeguarding. Staff are well trained in identifying and reporting low-level concerns, including those relating to adults working with pupils. Staff also receive appropriate training so that the needs of the youngest children are understood and met well. For example, there are additional procedures in place at the start and end of the school day to share daily information between parents and staff. Staff are vigilant to signs of concern and report any worries appropriately.
46. Leaders provide a range of ways in which pupils can report and seek help if they are worried. Pupils report their worries to a range of individuals, including the school counselling team. The youngest children are taught about the range of adults who are available to help them, and how to contact emergency services if necessary. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including when online, through their PSHE lessons. The school has suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems in place. Leaders receive regular reports of any concerns and act upon them quickly.
47. Leaders ensure that processes for safer recruitment follow statutory guidance. The school carries out all required pre-employment checks for adults working with pupils, including staff, volunteers and members of the governing body. A suitable single central record of appointments (SCR) is kept appropriately and regularly scrutinised by governors as part of the school's monitoring arrangements.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Channing School
Department for Education number	309/6000
Registered charity number	312766
Address	Channing School The Bank Highgate London N6 5HF
Phone number	020 8340 2328
Email address	info@channing.co.uk
Website	www.channing.co.uk
Proprietor	Channing House Incorporated, Highgate
Chair	Mrs Leanne Leigh
Headteacher	Mrs Lindsey Hughes
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	998
Date of previous inspection	14 to 17 June 2022

Information about the school

49. Channing School is an independent day school for female pupils situated in Highgate, North London. The school is organised into a junior school, for pupils in Reception to Year 6, a senior school, for pupils in Years 7 to 11, and a sixth form, for pupils in Years 12 to 13. The school is a registered charity whose trustees also undertake roles on the governing body. There has been a change to the chair of governors since the previous inspection.
50. There are 48 children in the early years comprising two Reception classes.
51. The school has identified 229 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
52. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for 56 pupils.
53. The school states its aim as to foster fearless learners through inspiring education, exceptional co-curricular opportunities and meaningful partnerships, creating bespoke outcomes for every child, led by the motto “Each of us is intended to have a character all our own, to be what no other can exactly be and do what no other can exactly do” (William Ellery Channing). The school’s Unitarian ethos encourages pupils to be intellectually curious, open-minded and respectful. The school builds on the power of an all-girls education to develop kind, confident, articulate young women who are ready for life’s challenges.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

4 to 6 November 2025

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

55. 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

56. 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

For more information, please visit isi.net