

# School inspection report

18 to 20 March 2025

## **King's Ely**

Barton Road

Ely

Cambridgeshire

CB7 4DB

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 take their role seriously. They visit the school regularly to support senior leaders and monitor the effectiveness of leaders' actions. Governors ask challenging questions that focus on the school's continual development and improvement. They check the impact of policies and procedures by reviewing reports and engaging with staff and pupils.
2. The leadership team work closely together. They make decisions to achieve the school's core aim of providing every pupil with the best possible educational experience. This aim is well understood by pupils and actively reinforced by staff, which helps to create a mutually respectful environment. The school nurtures pupils' academic, emotional, social, creative and physical development, ensuring that the Standards are consistently met.
3. The broad and balanced curriculum offers pupils a comprehensive and enriching educational experience. Effective teaching, personalised support and engaging learning environments equip pupils, including those with additional needs, with the tools and opportunities to succeed.
4. Leaders' commitment to pupils' education and care is evident through the interweaving of high-quality pastoral care and the dynamic enrichment programme. This is a significant strength. This begins in Nursery and combines planned lessons with extensive individual support and a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. Pupils of all ages develop their independence, intellectual curiosity, creativity and socialisation particularly well. The enrichment programme is carefully designed by leaders and includes feedback from pupils. This gives leaders a secure understanding of how to nurture each pupil's potential. Pupils' participation in the programme is closely monitored to make sure that everyone benefits. This helps to build pupils' confidence and self-esteem, which contributes very positively to their physical and mental health and overall wellbeing.
5. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum is planned and taught to meet pupils' needs. The curriculum is well structured, allowing pupils to build their understanding of personal safety, families, relationships and health and wellbeing. Consequently, pupils develop essential skills and qualities such as leadership, resilience and communication, which equips them well for life in modern Britain.
6. In the main, the school's careers programme prepares pupils for their next stage of education and later life. However, pupils in the sixth form are not presented with a broad enough range of information that gives them a sufficient awareness of further education, training and career options.
7. Boarding house staff operate as a unified team. They provide a nurturing atmosphere where positive relationships help pupils to feel safe and valued and enhance their wellbeing. Boarders live together successfully in inclusive houses. Policies, routines, and procedures are well established.
8. Leaders ensure pupils' welfare through a robust approach to health and safety. Leaders maintain the premises, including the grounds and teaching and boarding accommodation well. Leaders are knowledgeable regarding health and safety. They keep thorough records and perform relevant checks systematically, including those related to fire safety.
9. Safeguarding is managed effectively. A culture of vigilance is embedded within the school community. Staff are thoroughly trained in safeguarding policies and procedures and provided with

regular updates. Staff are confident and understand their responsibilities to keep pupils safe, supported and well cared for.

## 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:

- provide sixth-form pupils with information and guidance on a suitably wide range of options as part of the careers education programme that enables pupils to make fully informed choices about their future pathways.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The governing body is closely involved in shaping the school's policies and systems. Specific committees focus on areas such as the early years, health and safety and safeguarding. Governors provide systematic support and guidance to leaders. They also challenge leaders to ensure they possess the knowledge and skills needed to fulfil their responsibilities effectively.
11. Leaders successfully communicate the school's purpose. This encourages pupils to lead positive, productive, successful and fulfilling lives, benefiting both themselves and the world around them. The school values, expressed with age-appropriate words such as kindness for pre-prep pupils and compassion for senior pupils, are consistently reinforced and well known amongst the school community. This helps to create an inclusive and harmonious environment.
12. Leaders and governors work together to identify the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They conduct surveys and carefully consider the views of pupils, parents and staff. This awareness informs the development of the school's comprehensive plans to provide high quality education and develop pupils' emotional, physical and intellectual wellbeing. Leaders have recently enhanced the health and wellbeing team, establishing year group leads and bringing together various services to ensure a co-ordinated approach to pupils' care that provides pupils with the best opportunities to thrive.
13. The school meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. There is an appropriate accessibility plan which is reviewed and updated as required. The plan includes specific measures to adjust the curriculum and site to meet pupils' needs. Recent adaptations include improving lighting and installing visual fire alarms throughout the school and boarding facilities.
14. Leaders keep themselves informed about any changes to the latest statutory guidance or regulations. They prioritise pupils' wellbeing. They focus on pupils' physical and emotional health while challenging them academically. Clear policies and protocols, which are understood by both staff and pupils, comply with relevant legislation and are implemented throughout the school. These policies are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary.
15. Leaders make the required information available to parents, much of which they provide through the school's website. Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and achievements through regular updates, parents' evenings and detailed annual reports. Leaders provide the local authority with annual financial reports for pupils in receipt of local authority funding.
16. Leaders engage with parents to address any concerns at the earliest opportunity. Leaders follow the school's policy to resolve complaints. A detailed log of complaints and low-level issues is maintained. Leaders routinely analyse these records to check for any recurring themes.
17. Leaders work closely with various external agencies, including children's services, academic support, and mental health services. This informs leaders' decision-making and ensures a co-ordinated approach to safeguarding the wellbeing of both day pupils and boarders.
18. Leaders' management of risk supports pupils' wellbeing, including boarders. Leaders understand the school's contextual risks, such as those associated with its open site. Leaders carefully evaluate and mitigate risks within the school community, maintaining detailed records. Thorough risk assessments are conducted for numerous situations, including the use of buildings and overseas

trips, such as to Kenya. Staff receive in-depth training on risk assessment, so they are confident in their responsibilities.

19. Early years leaders demonstrate an ambitious vision and high expectations for what children will achieve. Leaders and staff meet together to discuss teaching and learning. This ensures that children receive consistent and effective support. Children's wellbeing is prioritised. Staff conduct daily risk assessments to help maintain a secure and suitable learning environment.
20. Leaders promote a positive boarding experience. The welcoming and supportive environment instils a sense of belonging in pupils. Leaders have established appropriate structures and systems for the induction of new boarders. Boarders can raise their concerns and know they will be heard. Staff provide highly effective care based on their understanding of individual pupils' needs. Boarding staff develop positive and respectful relationships with pupils and respond quickly to provide the care and support pupils require.

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

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

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. The curriculum is designed to provide a comprehensive and balanced education, catering to pupils' different ages and abilities. Leaders have established an educational journey from Nursery through to Year 13 that seamlessly integrates skill development with knowledge acquisition across a very broad subject range, including extensive creative opportunities. The development of skills, such as collaboration, that support and enhance learning is threaded through the curriculum and begins right from the start. Children in the early years are taught to work together and help each other to care for animals, such as guinea pigs. Older pupils collaborate successfully while preparing a production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Leaders adapt the curriculum to make sure it remains relevant. For example, they have introduced a Cambridge Technical qualification (CTEC) in business in the sixth form, so that pupils can develop their interests. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives.
23. The early years curriculum enables children to learn effectively, including through creative play. Children enjoy the interesting activities planned for them. They make good progress across all areas of learning. Teachers support children's language development by modelling vocabulary and asking probing and challenging questions. For example, children can confidently and accurately explain the need for newly born chicks to move from an incubator to a brooder box and why this must be maintained at a warm temperature.
24. Leaders promote academic rigour and creativity in an environment where pupils are motivated to learn. Throughout the school, teachers set high academic expectations. They employ a diverse range of teaching methods and carefully select activities to engage pupils. Teachers' skilled verbal questioning helps enhance pupils' understanding. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge and their understanding of pupils' prior attainment, needs, and interests to teach lessons that enable pupils to build on their prior knowledge. The thoughtful use of technology allows pupils to research various topics, helping them to develop and refine their written work. Teachers plan lessons carefully, manage class time and behaviour effectively, and support pupils to learn new knowledge, all of which contribute to pupils' high levels of achievement.
25. Leaders' detailed assessment framework enables them to monitor pupils' progress. Teachers track what pupils know and can do. Teachers use the information they gather to make informed decisions about what subject content to teach and how best to teach this. Teachers give pupils both written and verbal feedback that helps pupils to understand the successful aspects of their work and identify the areas that require further development. Teachers use progress meetings with parents to explain what their child has learned and how parents can support future learning and achievements. Pupils make good progress and attain well in public examinations.
26. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive high-quality specialised support to improve their communication skills. Effective teaching strategies, such as extended thinking time and vocabulary support, help to develop pupils' confidence. This assistance ensures that pupils who speak EAL rapidly develop their language skills, leading to positive results in internal assessments and public examinations. Leadership opportunities, such as the language leaders' programme, where pupils visit local schools and help others to learn a language, further enhance pupils' confidence and skills to communicate in English.

27. Across all phases, leaders use robust systems to identify and support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers provide targeted strategies and personalised learning to help pupils make good progress and achieve success. Teachers are supported to help pupils who have SEND from the pastoral and academic teams and those leaders responsible for SEND provision. Pupils who have SEND are encouraged to identify the particular learning strategies that help them become confident and independent learners.
28. The school's extra-curricular and enrichment programmes are extensive and well attended. They are thoughtfully designed to help pupils develop their interests, talents and leadership skills, making them well-rounded learners. Inclusivity and diversity are central to these initiatives. Many clubs are created with substantial input from pupils. This enables ongoing review and improvement. The dynamic nature of these programmes encourages pupils to be creative and curious, enabling them to explore new activities and express themselves in varied ways. Numerous clubs are intentionally pupil-led to foster leadership and teamwork skills. The wide range of options available, purposeful support from staff and meaningful data collection on attendance, helps pupils, including boarders, to discover activities that inspire them, to build new friendships and enhance their overall wellbeing.

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

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

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

30. Pupils respond positively to initiatives to support equality, diversity, and inclusion. For instance, neurodiversity awareness week and visiting speakers who deliver talks on topics such as living with a stammer. Frequent open discussions about discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes help develop a culture of acceptance, tolerance and empathy. Pupils are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings through a wide range of curriculum activities such as a textiles project focusing on fashion, culture and identity. This approach promotes the development of pupils' self-knowledge and ultimately supports pupils' confidence.
31. The school develops pupils' spiritual and moral understanding through a well-structured religious studies (RS) curriculum and programme of activities. Pupils often consider moral messages, for example, exploring the story of Zacchaeus and reflecting whether it is good to climb high to seek a full and better view. Services and assemblies, particularly those centred around the chapels or the Cathedral, promote pupils' self-reflection. The choristers thrive in an environment that supports a high level of musicianship. They develop advanced knowledge about musical structures, such as interrupted cadences and syncopated rhythms.
32. The high-quality physical education (PE) teaching is inclusive. It boosts pupils' self-esteem and experience of teamwork. The programme of physical events offers opportunities for pupils to excel in sports and promotes lifelong participation in physical and mental health activities. The PE curriculum is carefully designed to teach younger pupils fundamental movement skills, which then provide the building blocks for older pupils to deepen their learning and master more complex skills. The transferable nature of some skills, such as developing resilience and the confidence to deal with pressure, supports pupils across many elements both within and beyond school.
33. An extensive PSHE curriculum, including relationship and sex education (RSE), educates pupils to make safe and informed choices. This is underpinned by the school's broader ethos and vision. The youngest children in Nursery explore and revisit key themes such as healthy lifestyles and families. Visiting speakers and focus days supplement teachers' delivery of the bespoke curriculum and reinforce key learning points. For older pupils, well-trained staff, often form tutors who know the pupils best, deliver the lessons. They adopt effective teaching methods as well as quizzes to check pupils' understanding. Teachers encourage age-appropriate discussion of various topics, such as healthy relationships, identity, drugs and informed consent. This teaches pupils how to make responsible and safe decisions very well. This also contributes to pupils' understanding and respect for each other.
34. Leaders and staff promote pupils' good behaviour by consistently applying the school's behaviour policy. Staff are positive role models. They demonstrate how to behave in a kind and inclusive manner. This leads to high standards of behaviour during lessons, at breaktimes and when pupils move around the school. Pupils are respectful of each other, for example, through turn-taking in conversations and celebrating each other's successes.
35. The effective anti-bullying strategy and up to date bullying logs reflect the swift action of staff in response to any bullying behaviour. In the rare instances of bullying, support is provided to both victims and perpetrators. Pupils are taught about the harmful consequences of bullying through the curriculum, anti-bullying week, assemblies and the anti-bullying posters on display around the

school. Pupils are encouraged to speak up if they witness bullying. This is achieved through the trusting relationships between staff and pupils and the opportunity to report anonymously through an online report form.

36. In the early years, there is a clearly mapped out programme for developing children's personal, emotional and physical development. Children are taught to be inquisitive and thoughtful. Teachers support children to think through tasks and apply problem-solving strategies and extend their learning. For example, children work together to build a model car, sticking windscreen wipers and rear brake lights on the car to make it safe. Children develop confidence and knowledge and are well prepared for Year 1.
37. Suitable admission and attendance registers are kept. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance effectively and any absences are swiftly followed up. The school informs the local authority promptly whenever pupils join or leave at non-standard transition times.
38. Supervision of pupils, including boarders, is thorough and responsive to changing circumstances. Staff are an active presence around the school. They are vigilant and alert at all times.
39. Required health and safety legislation is adhered to. The premises are well maintained and provide a safe environment for pupils. Systems to manage fire safety are robust. This includes undertaking fire risk assessments and carrying out routine fire evacuation drills, including for boarders. Clear medical care procedures are established and followed. Qualified nurses staff the medical centre and provide high-quality care to pupils who are hurt or unwell. First aid kits are strategically located around the school to ensure the rapid response to accidents or health-related incidents.
40. Boarding accommodation is comfortable. Pupils are encouraged to personalise their own spaces and securely lock away their valuables. House staff know pupils well. The highly effective boarding leaders take steps to enhance boarding accommodation, considering boarders' views. Recent developments include installing full-length mirrors and agreeing on changes to evening routines. Boarders are spoken with after visits to their guardians and any concerns are followed up promptly. Boarders are provided with good quality nutritionally balanced meals, and various snacks are readily available. Boarders can always contact a member of staff, including at night. There is a genuine culture of mutual respect and togetherness within the boarding community.

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

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

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

42. Pupils develop their economic understanding and awareness through the curriculum, which includes topics such as employment, wages and tax. Visiting speakers, including from a financial advisor and an ex-gambling addict, support pupils' understanding. Children in the early years and younger pupils in the pre-prep use coins to 'purchase' items from the role-play shop. Older pupils plan charity events, which allow them to apply their economic understanding in meaningful ways.
43. Leaders ensure that mutual respect and inclusivity is modelled by staff and older pupils and embedded in the curriculum and school life, including the boarding provision. For example, the pupil-led 'King's unity' group promotes diversity and ensures positive messages filter through the different phases of the school via assemblies and presentations covering topics such as dignity and inclusion. A range of talks help pupils to challenge stereotypes and promote respect and acceptance. This supports an environment where pupils live out inclusion through kindness and respect.
44. The careers programme is generally planned and delivered well. Leaders use the expertise of external speakers, including parents and alumni, to provide insights into different jobs and professions. The programme includes advice for pupils on making applications, interview techniques and support in undertaking work experience. The careers programme is designed to broaden pupils' horizons and help them make informed decisions at appropriate junctures, such as when choosing subject options. However, the scope of information presented to sixth-form pupils is somewhat limited. Pupils are not given sufficient information about the range of possible options and pathways after they leave school. As a result, they do not always have the breadth of knowledge to make informed choices about their next steps.
45. Through the curriculum, pupils are prepared for life in British society and display secure social, political and cultural understanding across subjects. For example, pupils show sensitivity and knowledge when learning about the Holocaust during RS lessons. Pupils recognise how the values of British society reflect the universal values of decency and respect for others. Pupils' understanding is further enhanced through focused events such as 'international week', where pupils from over forty nationalities come together to celebrate their cultural diversity and take part in an international cabaret concert. Furthermore, language exchanges and virtual interactions from around the globe promote cross-cultural respect and understanding. Teachers ensure that political themes or content are discussed impartially and without bias.
46. Various charitable events help pupils to understand and respond to the needs of others both within the school and in the wider community. Many pupils are involved in the peer support programme and pupils appreciate the help they receive from this. Pupils attend singing events in the Cathedral with pupils from local primary schools. Pupils link with and raise money for a school in Malawi. The school's culture of supporting others is evidenced through the 'switching the score' initiative, where numerous pupils teach members of staff to play a new instrument. Such activities help inform pupils' understanding of society and enable them to contribute positively to the lives of others.
47. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to take responsibility for their behaviour and demonstrate an age-appropriate respect for the law, democracy and diverse cultures. Pupils' respect for democratic processes and public institutions is reinforced through trips, incorporated into the curriculum and discussed in assemblies. Leaders exemplify good citizenship through their actions in creating a

democratic community that values the opinions of all members of the school. Pupils learn about democratic processes when they vote for prefects and participate in global events where they engage in debates about current global issues. The school council and prefects speak proudly about their roles in serving the community.

48. From an early age, staff help pupils develop a sense of justice and discern the difference between right and wrong, including through discussions on complex issues. For example, when older pupils debate alternatives to prison, they demonstrate a mature understanding of right and wrong, as well as the rule of law and the importance of structures that promote rehabilitation.
49. Teachers in the early years provide many opportunities for children to develop social confidence. Children sit attentively and demonstrate concentration when listening to stories. They are taught that it is responsible to be helpful. Children carefully stack chairs and clear away any mess after their creative activities. They learn to take turns, share and to be friendly towards others.

### **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 promote a robust culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Governors provide diligent and effective oversight through their work with the pastoral board. They also provide welcome advice and support. Governors and leaders follow comprehensive policies and processes that echo statutory guidance. The safeguarding governor is experienced and meets regularly with safeguarding leaders to understand issues, monitor any trends and check the effectiveness of the school's actions.
52. Leaders ensure the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has suitable training, resources and time to undertake the safeguarding role and to be responsive when required. The knowledgeable safeguarding team comprises representatives from key areas of the school, such as the early years, wellbeing, medical and boarding. They jointly provide relevant and up-to-date information which ensures that pupils receive appropriate early help and, where necessary, specialist support.
53. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Induction training for new staff is thorough. Throughout the year, the safeguarding team provides relevant updates tailored to different phases of the school to make sure that staff remain well informed and understand procedures. Staff are knowledgeable about potential safeguarding issues and are clear regarding the appropriate action to take when any potential concerns are identified. They understand the risks associated with extremism, know how to escalate concerns when required and have a clear understanding of whistleblowing procedures.
54. Leaders keep detailed and secure electronic records that include clear rationales for decisions. The safeguarding team have developed effective relationships with external agencies, referring cases as necessary and seeking advice.
55. Pupils, including those who board, are well supported. There are multiple processes for raising concerns, particularly the anonymous online reporting system. Pupils talk to trusted teachers when anxious or concerned and are confident that issues will be handled appropriately. Boarders are clear how to contact the independent listener should they have any worries or concerns.
56. Information and communication technology (ICT) and PSHE lessons teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Pupils are trained as digital ambassadors and present to parents about different applications and how to stay safe online. The school monitors online usage through filtering and monitoring systems, which alert the safeguarding team in real time to any breaches. The safeguarding team take swift and appropriate action as necessary.
57. Leaders conduct suitable recruitment checks on governors, staff and volunteers before they begin to work at the school. Relevant staff are thoroughly trained in safer recruitment practices and are knowledgeable and secure in understanding their role. Leaders and governors check the central record of appointments to ensure it is accurately maintained.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	King's Ely
<b>Department for Education number</b>	873/6005
<b>Registered charity number</b>	802427
<b>Address</b>	King's Ely Barton Road Ely Cambridgeshire CB7 4DB
<b>Phone number</b>	01353 660700
<b>Email address</b>	reception@kingsely.org
<b>Website</b>	www.kingsely.org
<b>Proprietor</b>	The King's School, Ely
<b>Chair</b>	Mr David Day
<b>Principal</b>	Mr John Attwater
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	1155
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	180
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	18 November 2022

## Information about the school

59. King's Ely is an independent co-educational day and boarding school. It was founded over a thousand years ago on its current site in the city of Ely. It is a charitable trust, overseen by a board of governors. It comprises three sections: the pre-prep and nursery for children and pupils aged between 2 and 7 years; the prep school for pupils aged from 7 to 13 years; and the senior school for pupils aged from 13 to 19 years. The school educates the choristers of Ely Cathedral.
60. The school offers boarding for pupils from the age of 8. Boarders are accommodated in seven separate boarding houses, three for male pupils and four for female pupils.
61. There are 66 children in the early years. They enter King's Ely Acremont Nursery after their second birthday. There are two Nursery classes and two Reception classes.
62. The school has identified 37 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).
63. The school has identified 97 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
64. The school states its aims are to give the very best education, opportunities and pastoral care to as diverse a community of children as it can; to prepare each individual to live positive, productive, successful and fulfilled lives, for the betterment of themselves and the world around them; to ensure every child feels they are known and receives an excellent academic education that inspires curiosity and intellectual adventure and values and nurtures diverse talents to the full; to give a sense of place and belonging to all pupils, celebrating its unique environment and making the most of its ecological, historical, artistic, spiritual and economic resources; to create a genuinely diverse community, outward and forward looking and with a shared purpose; and to be a source of friends for life.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

18 to 20 March 2025

65. A team of 11 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

66. 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 principal, 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.

67. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)