

School inspection report

25 to 27 November 2025

Colchester Prep and High School

Wellesley Road

Colchester

CO3 3HD

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. Leaders have the knowledge and skills to carry out their roles effectively. Through systematic oversight of leaders' work, the proprietor assures themselves that the school's policies and procedures are implemented effectively to promote the wellbeing of pupils.
2. Leaders have established a learning community that reflects the school's values of kindness, tolerance, respect, equality, perseverance and courage. They provide a curriculum designed to build confidence, curiosity and aspiration. Leaders incorporate feedback from pupils, staff and parents to improve provision.
3. Leaders have developed a well-structured curriculum that equips pupils with the knowledge and skills needed to achieve across all subjects. The curriculum is focused on developing global awareness and future-ready skills and teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. The curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of all pupils and pupils are encouraged to self-reflect following feedback and assessment.
4. Teaching is characterised by thoughtful questioning and a focus on developing pupils' critical thinking and independence. Teachers check understanding carefully and provide clear feedback. However, they do not always make consistently effective use of resources to extend pupils' learning.
5. Leaders ensure that pupils' special educational needs are identified at an early stage. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress because teaching is adapted to meet pupils' individual needs.
6. Pupils demonstrate high levels of respect for one another and for staff. They listen attentively, consider different viewpoints thoughtfully and show empathy in their interactions. Mixed year-group activities and pupil leadership opportunities help pupils develop understanding, kindness and a genuine appreciation of others' needs.
7. Pupils behave well and are encouraged to develop strategies to help them manage their emotions and their behaviour. Strong relationships with adults encourage pupils to share concerns and the school's supportive community ensures bullying is rare and swiftly addressed.
8. Pupils contribute to society through extensive charity work and community engagement. They gain an understanding of equality, diversity and ethical issues, and a structured careers education broadens their awareness of future pathways and the world of work. Through these experiences, pupils contribute to their community and build the skills needed for life beyond school.
9. Leaders ensure that the premises are well maintained. There is a thorough approach to assessing and managing risk. Staff are well trained in first aid and provide wellbeing support.
10. The school provides parents with a range of useful information, mainly via its website. At the beginning of the inspection, some of the required information on the school's website was missing. This was rectified before the end of the on-site inspection.
11. Recruitment procedures are generally effective, with leaders demonstrating secure practice in most aspects of safer recruitment. During the inspection, leaders strengthened their approach by ensuring

that prohibition from management checks are now completed for all internal appointments to management roles.

12. Leaders maintain a robust culture of safeguarding. Staff are well trained and understand their responsibilities to report concerns promptly. Leaders work closely with external agencies, including the local authority, to protect pupils who may be at risk of harm.

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 prohibition from management checks are carried out for all appointments to management roles
- ensure that all inspection reports are made available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils, as required
- ensure that teachers make consistently effective use of resources to extend pupils' learning.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. Leaders actively monitor the quality of education that pupils receive. Leaders report to the proprietor on all areas of school life. The proprietor challenges as well as supports leaders to ensure that the Standards are consistently met. Directors, who represent the proprietor, have the necessary knowledge and skills to scrutinise and evaluate policies, procedures and leaders' work through on-site visits and termly focused reports. The proprietor supports leaders in making well-informed decisions to enhance the quality of pupils' education, for example in the development of the science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) curriculum.
14. Leaders at all levels have established a culture that prioritises pupils' wellbeing, collaboration and discovery. The values of kindness, tolerance, respect, equality, perseverance and courage underpin leaders' strategic decisions, alongside the development of a curriculum that fosters academic excellence, global awareness and social responsibility. Leadership in the early years plays an important role in this whole-school vision by ensuring that the youngest children experience a secure, nurturing environment in which foundational skills and positive learning habits are built.
15. Leaders have established a curriculum that focuses on developing inspirational leaders and change-makers. This is reflected in a wide range of leadership opportunities and the development of a curriculum that integrates STEAM into a single, cohesive learning framework.
16. Leaders use a wide range of information to evaluate the effectiveness of provision for pupils. They regularly consider the views of parents, staff and pupils. Recent improvements in response to feedback include the introduction of a global perspectives curriculum and a commitment to increasing teaching time in science.
17. Leaders promote kindness and respect. This is reflected in the positive relationships that exist across the school. There is a consistent approach to supporting pupils to manage their behaviour and emotions and pupils interact positively with each other, contributing to a cohesive community. Leaders have ensured successful integration of pupils arriving in the school following the closure of a nearby school.
18. Leaders ensure staff, including those with safeguarding responsibilities, have the knowledge and skills they need to carry out their roles effectively. They liaise effectively and in a timely manner with external agencies so that pupils receive the support they need.
19. Early years leaders provide regular guidance to enable staff to support the learning and development of children, ensuring that they make progress from the earliest stages. In the Nursery, children develop early problem-solving and recall skills. Leaders also ensure rich opportunities for exploration through weekly outdoor sessions, where children investigate their environment safely.
20. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The school has a suitable accessibility plan that considers the curriculum, physical environment and the accessibility of information. Careful monitoring of progress, including for those who have SEND, enable staff to put in place targeted strategies to ensure pupils can access the school provision successfully.
21. Leaders are conscientious in ensuring the effective management of risk. Well-trained leaders and staff put in place risk assessments that identify suitable measures to keep pupils safe and appropriate action is taken to reduce risk for all members of the school community. These include

those for the science and technology facilities, overseas trips and drama productions, as well as individual action plans for pupils' specific needs.

22. Leaders provide appropriate information to parents, pupils, staff and relevant external agencies. Most information can be accessed on the school's website, including the school's latest policies and procedures. However, leaders have not made all inspection reports available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils as required. This oversight was rectified during the inspection.
23. Parents are provided with encouraging, detailed and personalised reports about their child's progress, achievement and learning habits. Leaders provide required information to the local authority related to pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) and share information regarding the finance and funding for these pupils.
24. The school has a suitable complaints policy. Leaders ensure that concerns raised by parents are followed up promptly. When they arise, leaders take effective action to resolve complaints and respond within the published timeframes. Leaders and the proprietor regularly review the impact of complaints and take action to update policies and procedures where appropriate.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

26. Leaders have developed an integrated STEAM curriculum, so that pupils have opportunities to develop a wide range of skills such as problem-solving, creativity and teamwork. Leaders regularly review the curriculum for its suitability and relevance to ensure that it is appropriately resourced. Recent developments include the introduction of global perspectives to prepare pupils for an ever-changing world. The programme for children in the early years is responsive to their developmental needs and includes well-planned and engaging activities. In the prep school, pupils are encouraged to think flexibly and see connections across subjects. Pupils develop the knowledge and skills that enable them to be well prepared for the next stage of their education and their future lives.
27. Teachers have high levels of subject knowledge. They engage pupils through discussion, respond carefully to pupils' questions and check for pupils' understanding before moving on to new concepts. Teachers' focused feedback after assignments ensures that pupils know how to improve their work.
28. Teachers plan lessons that enable pupils to build on their knowledge and understanding and, in many lessons, they use resources effectively, including digital devices and practical materials to support pupil progress. In these lessons, pupils benefit from well-chosen resources that enhance explanation, promote engagement and extend thinking. However, this effective use of resources is not consistent across the school and, in some lessons, the resources selected do not sufficiently support or extend pupils' learning.
29. Teaching throughout the school encourages pupils to think critically, reflect purposefully and articulate their ideas confidently across subjects. In Year 2, pupils self-assess their science work and in Year 9, pupils construct evaluative responses on urbanisation in Geography. In subjects such as global perspectives and English, pupils work independently and present ideas to their peers. Across the school, pupils show a willingness to engage intellectually, readily asking questions and showing confidence when exploring new concepts.
30. Children in the early years are challenged to solve problems creatively, such as devising ways for small electronic devices to travel beneath a Lego bridge. Teachers question children with care, so that they extend their vocabulary as well as their thinking skills. Teachers place a strong emphasis on developing early literacy and numeracy skills, offering structured opportunities for children to practise phonics, develop vocabulary and apply mathematical concepts in meaningful contexts. In addition, teachers use higher-level vocabulary consistently, enabling children to develop their communication skills.
31. In science, technology and engineering, pupils practise and secure their knowledge of concepts through regular practical activities. They develop inquiry and research skills, and the curriculum encourages pupils to relate their learning in science to real-life contexts, drawing on pupils' experiences and knowledge of the world around them. Pupils from Year 3 to Year 11 are provided with their own digital devices, developing their digital literacy and responsible use of the internet and artificial intelligence (AI).
32. The provision for pupils who have SEND is effective. Supportive staff prioritise pupils' individual learning needs and wellbeing. Pupils' needs are identified swiftly when they join the school through assessment, observation and close liaison with parents. Leaders and staff with dedicated

responsibilities for pupils who have SEND work closely with teachers. Leaders ensure that appropriate strategies are implemented sensitively in the classroom and, where needed, through additional sessions outside lessons, particularly in the senior school. Individual support plans are carefully considered, regularly reviewed and used to guide targeted support, including for pupils who have an EHC plan. Staff are well equipped with the knowledge and skills to adapt learning effectively and to monitor the impact of strategies over time. As a result, pupils who have SEND make consistently good progress from their starting points, develop confidence and build positive working relationships with staff that support their academic and emotional development.

33. A robust framework for baseline assessment and pupil feedback is in place. Leaders ensure that tracking is regular and systematic, and provides a clear overview of pupils' learning habits and academic and pastoral development. Teachers use ongoing assessments to check understanding, identify emerging needs and refine teaching accordingly. Pupils make sustained progress and leaders review outcomes carefully, including external examination results, using these insights to inform future planning and provision.
34. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive effective support that promotes their language development and access to the full curriculum. Staff use assessment information to identify individual language needs and adapt teaching through approaches such as vocabulary modelling, visual scaffolds and structured opportunities for speaking and listening. Regular communication with parents helps to ensure that pupils who speak EAL make secure and confident progress.
35. A comprehensive programme of extra-curricular activities and clubs extends pupils' learning beyond the classroom. These are wide-ranging, from drone and robotics clubs to technical theatre and basketball. Leaders respond to pupils' requests for specific clubs that engage their interest. Pupils participate enthusiastically, develop new interests and skills and are proud to represent the school in competitive sports fixtures.

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

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

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

37. Pupils are consistently welcoming and polite. They understand and apply the school's values of kindness, tolerance, respect and equality in their daily interactions. They support one another, celebrate differences and contribute positively to the school community. Teachers model these behaviours and pupils respond well to the clear expectations set for conduct both in lessons and around the school. Consequently, pupils exhibit positive behaviour. Bullying is rare but, if it occurs, staff respond swiftly and appropriately to support all involved.
38. Pupils develop self-awareness and are supported to understand their emotions and respond thoughtfully to challenges. Teachers encourage them to listen and consider different perspectives. Pupils are confident to share concerns at an early stage, drawing on the support available from experienced pastoral staff. Anti-bullying ambassadors play an active role in promoting positive relationships and encouraging pupils to seek help when needed. The school's clubs, societies and mixed-age activities help pupils build connections across year groups, fostering a collegiate atmosphere in which pupils support one another.
39. Children in the early years develop confidence and independence within an environment where staff are attentive to their needs and responsive to their ideas. The outdoor space is equipped to support all areas of learning, enabling children to extend their play and exploration beyond the classroom. During outdoor activities, children confidently apply early mathematical concepts, and daily check-ins encourage children to recognise and express their emotions. Regular visits to a local woodland further enrich this experience, giving younger children opportunities to explore the natural world.
40. There is a well-planned curriculum in place for physical education (PE). Children in the pre-prep and Reception develop their strength and co-ordination through gymnastics, games and outdoor play. Pupils of all ages participate regularly in sport and physical activity, including representing the school in cross-county running, rugby, netball, basketball and football. These opportunities promote pupils' understanding of the importance of healthy, active lifestyles and encourage self-confidence and emotional wellbeing.
41. Pupils develop their spiritual and moral understanding through opportunities to explore complex ethical and historical themes. In Year 9 history, pupils examine the causes and consequences of the First World War and discuss issues such as the changing role of women. They ask thoughtful questions and work collaboratively to share ideas. In religious studies, pupils reflect on moral and ethical issues, drawing on different religious perspectives and evaluating arguments. Sensitive adjustments support pupils who have SEND, enabling all pupils to participate and develop considered, evidence-based viewpoints.
42. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum includes relationships and sex education (RSE) in accordance with statutory guidance. RSE is supported by seeking parental views and the school liaises sensitively with families, providing alternative resources where requested. Lessons are primarily delivered in mixed-gender groups, with single-sex sessions for specific topics as appropriate. Pupils submit questions anonymously and receive reminders about trusted adults to reinforce safeguarding. The curriculum covers consent, respect and healthy relationships and is complemented by workshops from external specialists.

43. Systematic and regular checks support leaders in maintaining a safe and well-maintained school environment. Risk assessment procedures are thorough. Staff take prompt action when issues arise, and records of maintenance and safety checks are thorough and up to date. Fire risk assessments and routine fire alarm system checks are carried out as required. Termly fire drills ensure that all members of the school community understand how to respond in an emergency.
44. Leaders ensure that qualified first aiders, including those with paediatric first aid training, are available whenever children are on site. Appropriate processes are in place for administering first aid and managing medicines and the supervision of snack and mealtimes in the early years. Throughout the school, staff supervise pupils vigilantly and in age-appropriate ways. Leaders review records of accidents to inform their ongoing assessment of potential risks and pupils have access to a wellbeing room where they can share concerns with supportive staff.
45. Attendance and admission registers are suitably maintained. The school reports to the local authority on pupil attendance as required and informs them of pupils who join and leave the school at non-standard transition points. The school's attendance policy encourages pupils' personal responsibility, punctuality and full participation in school life.
46. Pupils benefit from a broad range of leadership opportunities, including roles such as head of school and responsibilities within sport, fundraising and house activities. They value their roles in the school and understand the responsibility they have in helping to shape the school community.

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

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

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

48. Pupils throughout the school have a highly developed sense of empathy and responsibility. They take part in a wide range of pupil-led charity initiatives, such as a campaign day in which everyone wears pink to raise awareness of breast cancer. Pupils develop confidence in research and public speaking through projects focused on local need, such as the 'change-makers of tomorrow' appeal, which explores issues of seasonal poverty. In response, many pupils donate warm winter clothing for local people in need. These activities help pupils understand their role in supporting others, strengthening their sense of social responsibility and connection to the local community.
49. From the early years, pupils learn to respect difference and consider viewpoints other than their own through the school's wide range of curriculum and community initiatives. Lessons, assemblies and external workshops provide structured opportunities for pupils to explore contrasting perspectives on social and ethical issues. Through pupil-led projects, such as charity fundraising, environmental action and community engagement, pupils work collaboratively across year groups and encounter diverse experiences and opinions. These activities encourage pupils to appreciate the varied backgrounds and beliefs represented within their school and the wider community.
50. Pupils explore the importance of equality and respect for the rights of others through assemblies, the PSHE programme and community activities such as pupil-led foodbank collections. As they move into the senior school, pupils deepen their understanding of diversity and differing viewpoints through subjects such as history, religious studies and global perspectives, where they consider ethical issues, religious beliefs and social change.
51. The school provides a comprehensive careers programme that develops pupils' understanding of the world of work from an early age. Pupils begin exploring different professions in the prep school, where visitors from the emergency services and healthcare professionals introduce younger pupils to a range of roles and responsibilities. From Year 4 onwards, careers education is embedded within the PSHE curriculum, helping pupils consider their own interests, aptitudes and the behaviours expected in workplace environments. As pupils move into the senior school, tutors offer guidance during key transition points, including GCSE option choices. Specialist external providers deliver impartial advice on education, apprenticeships and employment pathways. Visiting speakers, former pupils and parents contribute to pupils' awareness of possible futures, and work-related experiences help deepen this understanding.
52. From an early age, pupils learn about the concept of democracy. Pupils vote for roles of responsibility such as positions on the school council and for the heads of school. Pupils know that voicing their opinion can have a direct impact, as leaders respond to requests made by the school council about uniform and which activities should take place.
53. Pupils develop economic awareness through both curriculum experiences and wider school activities. They take part in practical projects, such as running a stall through the art club, where they make decisions about pricing, products and budgeting for the Christmas fair. In the early years, children begin to explore basic economic and mathematical ideas through play, for example by handling coins, using role-play shops and making simple choices about buying and selling. These activities also strengthen children's social development as they collaborate, negotiate roles and communicate during shared tasks.

54. The curriculum is designed to help pupils develop a strong understanding of public institutions, democracy and the rule of law. Through PSHE lessons, assemblies and form-time activities, pupils learn about decision-making and democratic processes. They explore issues such as consent and online safety with external specialists, gaining insight into how laws protect individuals and support wider society. Activities such as school council elections and pupil-led charity initiatives give pupils practical experience of participation in civic life.

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

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

Safeguarding

56. Safeguarding is effective and staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures. Staff receive regular training so that they remain alert and able to identify early signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Staff fully understand the arrangements to report and record any concerns about pupils' welfare. Regular safeguarding meetings ensure concerns are identified and acted on. Induction for new staff is comprehensive, and concerns are identified and followed up appropriately to protect pupils from harm.
57. Staff understand the importance of professional behaviour and the necessity to abide by their code of conduct. They report any low-level concerns they have about colleagues and understand how to refer any allegations about staff behaviour.
58. Safeguarding leaders are well trained and diligent in following up concerns. Records of safeguarding issues are detailed and document the actions taken and the rationale for decisions. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, such as children's services, to secure the right support for pupils.
59. Leaders ensure statutory safeguarding guidance is implemented effectively, including in relation to attendance. Staff monitor attendance and follow up promptly on any unexplained absences, reporting to the local authority when necessary. The school's internet filtering and monitoring systems are regularly tested and reviewed to identify potential risks.
60. Pupils make good use of a range of communication channels and know who they can talk to if they have worries or concerns. Leaders maintain detailed records of pupils' concerns, which they review regularly. This helps inform the school's PSHE curriculum as well as the ways staff work with pupils to resolve any issues. Staff are approachable and accessible, and pupils share concerns with staff.
61. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through discussions in form periods, assemblies and the wider curriculum. The school's policies related to the use of devices are understood by pupils and staff and consistently enforced, promoting a safe learning environment. These systems help pupils develop the knowledge and confidence to stay safe.
62. The school carries out all required pre-employment checks on staff, except for some prohibition from management checks for internal appointments to management roles. These checks were carried out during the inspection and all required checks are now recorded accurately in the school's single central record of appointments.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

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| School | Colchester Prep and High School |
| Department for Education number | 881/6015 |
| Address | Colchester Prep and High School Wellesley Road Colchester Essex CO3 3HD |
| Phone number | 01206 573389 |
| Email address | info@colchesterhighschool.co.uk |
| Website | www.colchesterhighschool.co.uk |
| Proprietor | Cognita Schools Limited |
| Chair | Mr Michael Drake |
| Headteacher | Ms Karen Gracie-Langrick |
| Age range | 2 to 16 |
| Number of pupils | 281 |
| Date of previous inspection | 6 to 8 December 2022 |

Information about the school

64. Colchester Prep and High School is a co-educational independent day school in Essex. The school is owned by Cognita Schools Ltd. It comprises three sections: an early years setting, for children aged 2 to 5 years; the prep school, for pupils aged 5 to 11 years; and the senior school, for pupils aged 11 to 16 years.
65. There are 28 children in the early years, comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
66. The school has identified 73 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
67. The school has identified English as an additional language for 17 pupils.
68. The school states its aims are to build a brighter future for all, preparing children to become the changemakers of tomorrow's world. It intends to provide an inspiring education which builds self-belief and empowers individuals to succeed. It seeks to provide a holistic education that fosters a safe, happy and supportive environment in which everyone can thrive and feel a valued and respected member of an inclusive community.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

25 to 27 November 2025

69. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The on-site inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

70. 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 proprietor
- 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.

71. 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

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