

School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

Cardiff Sixth Form College, Cambridge

89 Regent Street

Cambridge

CB1 2AW

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

Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders and governors demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills and ensure that the Standards are met. Through regular visits and detailed reporting, governors provide effective oversight of the school, including boarding and safeguarding. Leaders evaluate the school's work and take action to maintain the quality of provision. Monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is well established and identifies areas for improvement so that pupils continue to learn effectively.
2. The quality of education supports pupils' academic aspirations, including preparation for higher education. Teaching enables pupils to make good progress from their starting points. Most pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL) and targeted support enables them to access the curriculum effectively.
3. Where pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), they are well supported and make good progress.
4. The school promotes pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing with consideration for pupils' ages and backgrounds. The boarding environment provides continuity of care and supports pupils' development. Pupils feel safe and are supported effectively by experienced pastoral staff. If pupils have a concern, they understand how to get help. However, opportunities for recreational and physical activity are not consistently developed. As a result, some pupils do not participate in these activities as regularly as they could.
5. Provision for pupils' social and economic education runs alongside the academic content of A levels in a cohesive way and this supports pupils' development. The international boarding community also supports pupils in building their independence and global awareness. Boarding pupils take responsibility for themselves and gain skills that prepare them for life after school. The curriculum supports pupils' understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils benefit from structured careers guidance, which includes visits to universities and talks by external speakers, as well as activities to help them prepare for life beyond school. Well-planned and regularly delivered opportunities to explore diversity and moral questions align closely with the ethos of the school, including helping pupils to understand concepts of faith in a supportive way. Pupils develop an understanding of economic matters, including financial responsibility.
6. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Staff are suitably trained and systems are in place to identify and respond to concerns. Staff understand the importance of referring any concerns they have, and leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are well supported by the safeguarding governor to ensure consistency. Leaders are vigilant and ensure that processes and checks involved in the recruitment of new staff are robustly followed.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- strengthen the programme of recreational activities to enable pupils to broaden their interests and develop new skills
- ensure that pupils regularly participate in physical activity to benefit their health and wellbeing.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Leaders and governors demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills and ensure that the Standards are consistently met, and that the school meets its stated aims. Governors provide effective oversight of the school's work through regular visits, including to boarding houses, and through detailed and regular reviews of safeguarding and welfare.
8. Governors meet leaders frequently to provide effective oversight of decisions and actions within the operation of the school. Leaders and governors understand the way in which strategic oversight and operational activity relate to one another and, as a result, governors understand the provision of the school well. This enables them to maintain a clear understanding of the school's priorities.
9. Leaders support the school's aim of promoting academic excellence effectively. They regularly evaluate the school's provision and use this to inform development planning. There is a well-developed strategic plan and quality assurance cycle that outlines areas for development. Monitoring activities by leaders to support this include lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. Leaders analyse assessment data to identify trends in pupils' progress and use this to determine how the curriculum should be developed and how teaching can be adapted to benefit pupils.
10. Leaders consider the wider experience of pupils and respond to their suggestions and feedback, including about boarding routines and school life, through councils and pupil meetings. Leaders specifically create focus groups with targeted cohorts of pupils to ensure that all voices are heard. Leaders use this information effectively to make adjustments to provision.
11. Communication with parents is regular and includes written reports on their child's progress. Required information is available via the school's website, and complaints are recorded and managed appropriately through a three-stage process which includes the opportunity to resolve complaints informally.
12. The school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, and an accessibility plan is in place which covers access to buildings as well as the curriculum and wider school activity.
13. Leaders maintain links with external agencies, including local safeguarding partners and the local authority. Proprietors provide school staff with group-wide training and support. This creates a network across the group through which staff can share best practice, particularly around safeguarding and the development of teaching. Leaders know that they must inform the local authority when pupils of compulsory school age join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.
14. Leaders manage any risk to pupils effectively. Risk assessments are thorough and regularly reviewed, including for boarding and off-site activities. Leaders understand the nature of the school site and manage transitions between its sites across the city in a way that considers pupils' safety.

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

15. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

16. The school delivers a curriculum that emphasises academic subjects, with A Levels in science, mathematics and computer science as the core offer to pupils. Opportunities for wider experiences, such as in the aesthetic and creative areas of learning, are provided through additional activities such as music and arts projects. Pupils are encouraged to develop their learning beyond their lessons, including by competing in academic Olympiads. Additional opportunities, including the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), support pupils in extending their knowledge and preparing them well for higher education.
17. The school enables pupils to contextualise their understanding of technical subjects. For example, recent extended projects include the construction of a nuclear fusor, the development of a superconductor railway and the creation of an algae fuel cell. These projects allow students to explore complex scientific concepts and put theory into practice, fostering both technical skills and creative thinking.
18. Teaching enables pupils to acquire knowledge and develop their skills over time. Pupils are engaged and focused in lessons. Teachers demonstrate suitable subject knowledge and explain concepts clearly. Pupils work independently, apply their understanding and support each other with academic study outside lessons. Pupils can recall and apply prior learning. Pupils make good progress over time.
19. The school sets high expectations for performance in examinations by pupils and explicitly requires high standards in order to progress to Year 13. Pupils achieve success in public examinations at A level and a large proportion of pupils achieve high grades. Almost all pupils progress to universities of their choice.
20. Most pupils speak EAL. Leaders ensure that pupils who speak EAL are supported in developing their English language skills so that they can access the curriculum. Provision such as 'English for academic purposes' supports pupils in developing subject-specific language. Pupils are able to participate in lessons and develop confidence in using English in academic activities and socially, including in boarding.
21. Pupils who have SEND are identified and supported effectively. Individual education plans (IEPs) are in place and staff are aware of pupils' needs. Oversight by leaders, including those with responsibility for pupils who have SEND, means that these pupils are well supported and that appropriate adjustments are made to accommodate their needs. Teachers provide pupils with individualised support, including outside of lessons. Pupils who have SEND make good progress.
22. Teachers use assessment to monitor progress and provide feedback that helps pupils to improve their work. This is tracked systematically at department level and informs future curriculum development.
23. Opportunities for recreation outside the formal curriculum are limited. Although activities are available, such as the opportunity to attend music concerts and recitals in the local area, they are not accessed by all pupils. This limits pupils' opportunities to develop interests beyond the classroom.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

25. Arrangements to promote pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are effective. The school provides a purposeful environment in which pupils live and learn. Most pupils are boarders, and regular communication between boarding and teaching staff supports continuity between academic and pastoral care. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive, and pupils are respected within a welcoming environment that enhances their overall experience of school.
26. Boarding supports pupils in developing independence and personal responsibility. Pupils manage aspects of daily life, such as organising their study and routines, and develop confidence in doing so. Boarding staff provide a structured induction programme for new pupils, many of whom are joining the school from overseas, and this helps them to settle into a new cultural environment. Boarding staff are caring and approachable.
27. Leaders ensure that the school supports pupils of all faiths and none through assemblies and the provision of a quiet multi-faith space within the main teaching building. This allows pupils to consider and develop spiritual understanding of themselves and others in a supportive environment.
28. Pastoral systems are well established. Staff monitor pupils' wellbeing and respond appropriately to concerns. For example, weekly pastoral meetings identify pupils who may require additional support and this is put in place as needed. Pupils have access to a range of support, including tutors, boarding staff, counsellors and a professionally staffed medical centre. The school employs a counsellor to support pupils experiencing anxiety. Pupils know who to approach if they need help.
29. The school provides personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), including relationships and sex education (RSE). The programme covers a wide range of topics, including consent, relationships, financial awareness, online safety and fraud. For example, pupils learn about issues such as cryptocurrency and online scams. Assessment within PSHE is used well to inform planning and to develop the curriculum as society changes.
30. Pupils behave well in lessons, at mealtimes and around the school. They are polite and respectful towards each other and staff. Anti-bullying procedures are in place and implemented appropriately. Pupils report that bullying is rare and that it is dealt with effectively. Pupils demonstrate mutual respect and understanding as a result of the school's promotion of the importance of recognising that every individual is unique and that all share a commonality.
31. Leaders maintain appropriate health and safety arrangements for the site. The buildings are well maintained and leaders put measures in place to promote pupils' safety. For example, access to buildings is controlled via electronic entry systems, and security measures such as CCTV are used where appropriate. Fire safety procedures are implemented effectively, with regular drills ensuring that pupils understand how to respond in an emergency. Risk assessments are detailed and reviewed regularly, including for boarding and off-site activities.
32. Leaders actively promote high levels of attendance at school and have well-established procedures during the school day and in boarding to follow up any unexplained pupil absence. A clear attendance policy is in place and the recording of attendance is in line with current statutory guidance. Admission and attendance registers are maintained accurately.

33. Opportunities for physical activity are not consistently developed. While provision is available, including access to local leisure facilities and informal sports activities, these are not structured or timetabled in a way that suits all pupils. As a result, participation by pupils in these opportunities is uneven.
34. Leaders ensure that the security of both teaching and boarding facilities is a priority and use appropriate systems to prevent unauthorised access to indoor and outdoor areas where pupils may be. In the event of an emergency, lockdown procedures are clearly displayed and well known to staff and pupils.

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

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

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

36. The school's provision successfully supports pupils' social development. Daily interaction within the boarding environment, enhanced by well-planned occasions such as supported social events and faith celebrations, helps pupils to develop an understanding of different cultures and perspectives. As a result, pupils learn to live alongside others from different backgrounds and develop respect for diversity.
37. The curriculum supports pupils' understanding of wider society. Pupils learn about fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law and mutual respect. The school ensures that teaching is balanced and does not promote partisan political views. Pupils engage with a range of perspectives and develop critical thinking skills through participation in political debates and discussions of complex topics, such as recent developments in applied science.
38. The school promotes a specific focus on oracy. This runs as a thread through all teaching and encourages pupils to build their confidence and take part fully in school life. The emphasis on oracy skills actively supports pupils' acquisition of fluent English and the development of their understanding of the UK, including public institutions and services in England, through participation in debates and discussions in class.
39. Staff with responsibility for boarding support pupils in developing independence and practical life skills such as managing shared spaces and preparing meals. Pupils manage daily routines and take responsibility for their personal organisation. They develop confidence and resilience through these experiences so that boarding prepares them well for independent living in the future.
40. Opportunities are available for pupils to take on roles of responsibility within the school community. There are well-established pupil councils which include a specific boarding group. These groups meet regularly, both independently and with school leaders, to develop ideas for the school and organise activities, such as fundraising through charity cake sales, and social events. Pupils also have the opportunity to gain experience of the world of work through structured observations at local businesses.
41. Careers guidance is structured and supports pupils' preparation for life beyond school. The programme is aligned to recognised benchmarks and includes university visits, external speakers and guidance on career pathways. Pupils are offered regular meetings with careers guidance staff to support them in applications for university and preparation for work. Most pupils aim to follow a science, engineering or mathematics pathway after school, but the school ensures that guidance is independent and includes information on other pathways, such as degree apprenticeships or creative and arts routes.
42. Pupils develop an understanding of economic matters, including financial education topics such as budgeting and managing money, as well as how to open a bank account in the UK. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education or progression into work.
43. Pupils integrate well within the school community. Leaders encourage participation in shared activities to promote wider engagement across the school community. This includes celebration of key moments in the calendars of different faith groups, as well as specific events, to understand

different national perspectives. This proactive approach by the school actively promotes harmonious relationships between different groups.

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

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

45. Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils are effective. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and updates on relevant risks, such as online safety and contextual safeguarding relevant to the school's locality. They understand how to identify and report concerns. Leaders use an electronic system to manage safeguarding records effectively and ensure that concerns are followed up, including referrals to external agencies if required.
46. Pupils report that they feel safe and know how to seek help. They understand who they can speak to if they have concerns. Staff are approachable and respond promptly to any concerns. The school provides clear routes for pupils to raise any issues, including within the boarding environment. Boarders know how to contact the independent person, who is readily available if called.
47. Recruitment procedures are implemented effectively, and required checks are completed thoroughly and recorded appropriately on the single central record of appointments (SCR). Governors provide oversight of safeguarding arrangements, including sampling records and involvement in training.
48. Leaders maintain links with external agencies, including local safeguarding partners, to support pupils. Procedures are in place to respond to concerns about pupils' welfare, and these are followed effectively and with appropriate care. Staff provide guidance to pupils on issues such as online safety and financial awareness.
49. There is a clear staff code of conduct which leaders ensure is well-publicised both before and during employment. Leaders are diligent in noting any potential concerns involving adults, including low-level concerns, and they liaise appropriately with external agencies when necessary.
50. Appropriate internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place to support pupils' online safety, and pupils are encouraged to think carefully about risks, both online and in the local community, to help keep themselves safe.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Cardiff Sixth Form College, Cambridge
Department for Education number	873/6058
Address	Cardiff Sixth Form College, Cambridge 89 Regent Street Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB1 2AW
Phone number	01223 903080
Email address	admissions@ccoex.com
Website	www.ccoex.com/cardiff-sixth-form-college-cambridge
Proprietor	Dukes Education Group Ltd
Chair	Mr Aatif Hassan
Headteacher	Dr Julian Davies
Age range	14 to 19
Number of pupils	99
Number of boarding pupils	95
Date of previous inspection	16 May 2023 (Ofsted)

Information about the school

52. Cardiff Sixth Form College, Cambridge is an independent co-educational boarding and day school providing A-Level courses focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, based in Cambridge. The school is owned and governed by Dukes Education Ltd, whose directors provide governance for the school. This is the first inspection carried out by ISI. The school was previously inspected by Ofsted.
53. At the time of the inspection, 95 pupils were boarding at a single site approximately one mile from the main teaching centre.
54. The school has identified four pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
55. The school has identified English as an additional language for 97 pupils.
56. The school states its aims are to provide an international setting for academic excellence and progression to the world's best universities.
57. The school's registration is for pupils between the ages of 14 to 19. At the time of the inspection, five pupils of compulsory school age were enrolled.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 April 2026

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

59. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- discussions with governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- 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.

60. 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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For more information, please visit isi.net