

School inspection report

10 to 12 March 2026

Kestrel House School

104 Crouch Hill

Crouch End

London

N8 9EA

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 place pupils' wellbeing at the centre of the school's vision through clearly articulated aims focused on pride, play and preparation. These core values are consistently embedded in strategic planning and daily practice, ensuring that pupils' emotional, physical and social wellbeing is prioritised across all aspects of school life.
2. Leaders and governors work effectively together to ensure that policies are implemented and monitored carefully. This ensures that Standards are met consistently.
3. Leaders provide clear and accurate information about the school on the website. However, at the start of the inspection, the policy for relationships and sex education (RSE) and the number of complaints for the previous year were not made available to parents. During the course of the inspection, leaders updated the website to include this information.
4. Leaders and staff implement their 'nest to flight' curriculum, which is appropriate to the needs of their pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). The curriculum integrates therapeutic approaches effectively, with clinical and education teams working collaboratively to promote regulation, self-awareness, independence and functional skills. This enables pupils to be prepared for their lives beyond school.
5. Leaders promote a dynamic self-evaluation process for the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of individual pupils extremely well. Self-evaluation is shared, understood and consistently implemented across the staff team and fosters a culture of continuous reflective practice and professional dialogue. As a result, the curriculum goes through ongoing cycles of adaptation to ensure pupils make meaningful and tangible progress from their individual starting points. Leaders and staff use their collective expertise to ensure that targets for pupils are manageable to enable them to build incrementally on their prior attainment. Targets are honed and amended when required, which leads to highly personalised planning that supports pupils' communication, independence and confidence. This well-judged and responsive leadership has a clear and demonstrable impact on pupils' learning and development and is a significant strength of the school.
6. Leaders provide a well-planned personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme, which is cohesively integrated with therapeutic support sessions. This approach is effective in supporting pupils to understand their emotions, develop self-regulation strategies and build positive self-esteem. Leaders promote healthy lifestyles, physical development and personal safety effectively, while fostering nurturing relationships and celebrating achievements.
7. Leaders recognise the importance of providing calm, low-stimulus environments to support pupils' emotional regulation and wellbeing. As a result, pupils benefit from consistent strategies and supportive classroom-based areas for pupils to manage their feelings. However, pupils do not always have access to quiet spaces beyond the classroom when they need to manage their emotions during times of heightened need.
8. Leaders ensure that pupils' social, cultural and economic development is promoted effectively through well-planned, practical experiences that support pupils' understanding of the wider world. Pupils learn to respect others, make choices and develop a sense of responsibility through everyday opportunities that reflect British values, such as democracy and inclusion. Leaders make effective

use of the local community and meaningful real-life experiences to develop pupils' independence, social confidence and life skills, preparing them well for life beyond school.

9. Leaders and governors maintain robust oversight of safeguarding and ensure that arrangements are effectively adapted to meet the needs of pupils. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and implemented consistently, supported by regular, well-tailored training that enables staff to recognise and respond promptly to concerns, including those communicated non-verbally.

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:

- consistently provide and make available all required information on the school's website so that parents of current and prospective pupils gain a full picture of the school
- consider how pupils can access additional quiet spaces around the school to help them regulate their emotions.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders actively promote and prioritise pupils' wellbeing through a clear and consistently embedded set of values centred on pride, play and preparation. These values inform strategic decision-making and daily practice. Leaders foster 'pride' through an emphasis on personal achievement, self-esteem and respectful relationships, enabling pupils to develop confidence and a sense of belonging. Leaders promote 'play' as an essential component of learning and regulation, providing opportunities for pupils to engage positively with others. 'Preparation' underpins leaders' focus on equipping pupils with the skills, routines and resilience needed for future learning and independence. As a result, pupils are supported and valued, and their wellbeing is promoted effectively.
11. Governors maintain a constructive and collaborative relationship with school leaders, regularly engaging in strategic dialogue to ensure the school's values are upheld and that policies are implemented effectively. Through meetings, audits and analysis of reports, governors offer both challenge and support, closely monitoring school improvement priorities and pupils' outcomes. Governors provide professional development opportunities for leaders, such as networking meetings, so that leaders hone their knowledge, skills and understanding. The effective oversight provided by governors ensures that Standards are met consistently.
12. Leaders have an effective and embedded approach to self-evaluation and strategy which is articulated through their 'Five to drive' development plan. Leaders demonstrate a deep and accurate understanding of pupils' needs through rigorous, ongoing reflection and review of practice. Leaders work cohesively with all staff to ensure that their views are an integral part of the evaluation process. They consider the best interests of the pupils through careful observation of pupils' behaviour and interactions, noting how and when these indicate preferences and needs. Leaders survey families termly, so that they can incorporate their views in development planning.
13. Leaders monitor the quality and impact of teaching through professional dialogue with staff and structured lesson observations. They use a dual-purpose lesson observation template to assess pupils' progress and teachers' performance, with evaluative discussions taking place after the observation. Leaders model effective practice and, at times, team-teach to support staff professional development. They meet with the education and clinical teams regularly to evaluate teaching and learning, with a view to developing it further where required. Leaders' decision-making is sharply focused on outcomes for pupils, with leaders and staff systematically evaluating pupils' progress and engagement to refine the learning environment, curriculum and teaching approaches.
14. Leaders have a comprehensive approach to risk. They ensure that potential hazards are identified and addressed promptly. Staff receive appropriate training to support implementation of a range of risk assessments, including the use of the 'life skills' room and when going on trips outside of school. Leaders adopt a proactive approach to pupils' welfare by ensuring that risk assessments incorporate consideration of individual pupils' needs and by reviewing whether mitigating actions remain effective.
15. Leaders communicate with parents about their child's progress through written reports and review meetings. Leaders typically provide and make available required information, and the school's website includes key policies and contact details. However, at the start of the inspection process, the

RSE policy was not on the website and the number of complaints for the previous year was not available to parents. Leaders rectified these issues by the end of the inspection.

16. Leaders ensure that the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. They implement a detailed accessibility plan which outlines actions to make the school site, curriculum and information as accessible as possible. Recent actions include a communication audit to review the effectiveness of alternative forms of communication and providing information in different formats according to individual needs.
17. Leaders develop and maintain effective relationships with external agencies. They work with different local authorities to review EHC plans annually and provide accountability for the use of associated finances. They liaise with the local attendance officer about pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition times.
18. Leaders have an effective process for handling complaints. A suitable complaints procedure is available on the school's website and outlines how complaints can be raised informally as well as formally. Leaders follow published timescales when managing complaints. They keep detailed information relating to complaints and take appropriate action when required.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders carefully design their ‘nest to flight’ curriculum to be matched to individual pupils’ targets. The curriculum is collaboratively planned by the clinical and education teams to enable pupils to develop functional skills and independence to prepare them for adult life. The curriculum is flexible so that staff can follow pupils’ interests wherever possible, resulting in high levels of engagement. This is particularly evident in the use of exploratory play, which provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to practise and consolidate skills, such as recognition of shapes and colours and counting objects.
21. Leaders are highly reflective about the effectiveness of the curriculum to ensure that pupils make progress. They instigate a continual process of refining and adapting their provision to ensure that teaching for each pupil is as effective as possible. Leaders provide ongoing training for staff and regular meetings to evaluate provision and discuss pupils’ progress. Leaders ensure that assessment is thorough and completely individualised. Staff assess individual pupils’ baseline skills so that they can track progress carefully through the ‘evidence for learning’ programme. Leaders and staff ensure that assessment meaningfully informs future teaching. If a pupil is not making sufficient progress, leaders and staff quickly respond by reviewing targets and ensuring that they are as achievable as possible by breaking down learning into smaller, more manageable steps. This ongoing cycle of reflecting on the curriculum, analysing pupils’ targets and adapting teaching to meet individual needs has a highly beneficial impact on pupils’ learning and development.
22. Leaders place a firm emphasis on the development of communication and language skills in order to support pupils to develop strategies to communicate. Leaders implement their own ‘augmentative and alternative communication’ (AAC) programme so that they can best support their pupils’ needs. The AAC programme involves using a sequence of objects, pictures, signs and technology to develop pupils’ communication skills. This enables pupils to learn single words, such as ‘go’ and ‘finish’ and then progress on to linking words to make simple sentences, such as ‘want, more, blue’. Leaders ensure that the education team has training and support from the clinical team to implement this programme consistently and effectively. They refine the programme as a result of considering pupils’ progress and how they can help them to improve further. Analysis of assessment data and pupils’ achievements in their communication targets enable leaders to demonstrate that pupils make tangible progress in processing instructions, expressing their feelings and needs, responding to questions and socialising with others.
23. Leaders have effective systems in place to ensure that pupils’ EHC plans are implemented well and reviewed regularly. Leaders ensure that individual pupils’ targets from their EHC plan are translated into small, manageable steps and communicated well to staff and parents. These targets are tracked through the school’s ‘evidence for learning’ programme and incorporated into the annual review of EHC plans. Leaders ensure that the clinical and education teams work cohesively with each other and the local authority to support pupils and their families through the review process.
24. Leaders ensure that the education team of teaching staff is knowledgeable about how to be responsive to pupils’ needs. The education team uses a range of stimulating resources and plans interesting topics, such as ‘minibeasts’ and ‘the Winter Olympics’, to engage pupils with their learning. They observe carefully so that they can respond to pupils’ interests and plan further activities to enable pupils to build on their progress. They liaise effectively with the clinical team to ensure that teaching and therapeutic sessions are integrated well to enable pupils to develop. This

includes the use of movement breaks to help pupils engage with learning further and the use of singing to help pupils calmly navigate transition times.

25. Leaders support pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) through the AAC programme. This enables pupils to develop their understanding of words in English and how to communicate their needs. Leaders review the 'evidence for learning' data to ensure that pupils who speak EAL make sufficient progress.
26. The curriculum is enriched through a variety of activities to expose pupils to a broad range of activities and experiences that prepare them for life beyond school. Leaders arrange regular 'community walks' to enable pupils to visit the cinema and attend sports sessions. They involve pupils in workshops provided by external presenters, including learning about the work of the Royal Opera House and experiencing close encounters with animals such as land snails and snakes. These experiences enable pupils to experience new environments, develop social interactions and learn different skills.

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

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

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

28. Leaders ensure that the PSHE curriculum is effective in enabling pupils to learn about how to support their own emotional wellbeing and physical health. Staff model how different feelings are expressed so that pupils learn about emotions. Leaders promote mental health awareness and provide support through 'thrive' sessions and music therapy, both of which support managing emotions and developing resilience. Staff help pupils to understand how to keep themselves healthy through eating well and managing personal hygiene. They support pupils to express themselves if they are feeling unwell or have injured themselves, and to use a chart to indicate where they are hurt and how bad the pain is. These processes are effective in enabling pupils to understand their own mental and physical health and the importance of seeking assistance when necessary.
29. Leaders promote pupils' physical development effectively through a well-taught physical education (PE) programme. Pupils participate in structured PE lessons which support their co-ordination and overall physical wellbeing. Swimming enables pupils to develop confidence and competence in water. Older pupils further extend their physical skills through weekly tennis sessions at local courts where they receive specialist coaching. Physical development is reinforced across the wider curriculum, including fine motor tasks to improve hand co-ordination, climbing on indoor and outdoor apparatus and movement-based play linked to stories such as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. These varied opportunities ensure that pupils develop physical skills while fostering positive attitudes towards an active lifestyle.
30. Leaders provide an effective RSE curriculum so that pupils develop personal and social skills. The curriculum is planned to ensure that it meets pupils' developmental stages and enables them to develop independence. Pupils learn about different body parts and which ones should be kept private. They learn how babies develop into adults and relate this to the changes they will experience at puberty. They learn about consent for physical touch and the importance of showing respect towards others. Teachers incorporate aspects of RSE into pupils' targets, such as remembering to respect other people's personal space. This ensures that staff work collectively with pupils on RSE targets and that pupils make good progress in this area.
31. Leaders support the development of pupils' spiritual awareness effectively through opportunities for reflection, curiosity and a growing understanding of themselves and the world around them. Quiet moments for reflection, alongside learning about emotions and relationships, help pupils to develop self-awareness and empathy for others.
32. Leaders enable pupils to develop an increasing understanding of their individual needs, alongside respect for others. Staff provide consistent, sensitive support that helps pupils build confidence and positive self-esteem. All successes, even small steps, are valued and celebrated so that pupils develop pride in their achievements and engage positively with activities at school. By working towards vocational awards through a nationally recognised assessment scheme, pupils gain confidence in their abilities.
33. Leaders provide the education team with effective training and resources to manage pupils' emotional regulation. Staff help pupils to understand their emotions and teach them strategies, such as breathing techniques or squeezing soft objects, to regulate themselves. Staff encourage pupils to seek help if required and to access self-regulation areas in the classrooms. However, pupils do not

always have much access to quiet spaces outside of the classroom to provide a calm area away from others at times when this would be beneficial in supporting their emotional regulation.

34. Leaders and staff consistently implement the behaviour and anti-bullying policies. Staff have up-to-date training on how to promote positive behaviour for pupils who have SEND. They offer regular and effective affirmation through verbal and non-verbal feedback. Staff implement appropriate, relevant consequences, when required, involving actions that are meaningfully linked to the pupils' behaviour, such as tidying up after themselves. Staff employ 'social stories' to help pupils make better decisions by understanding expected behaviours. Bullying does not occur very often but is effectively resolved if there are any issues.
35. Leaders prioritise health and safety to promote a positive physical environment. They ensure that the premises and school equipment are well maintained. Leaders commission external audits and action any recommendations arising from them in a timely manner. They ensure that processes relating to fire safety are thorough, including testing of fire equipment, conducting termly fire drills with pupils and providing training for staff. Leaders provide a suitable medical room to care for pupils who are unwell or injured at school. They ensure that a sufficient number of staff have first aid training.
36. Leaders ensure that pupils are well supervised throughout the school day. They take appropriate measures to enhance supervision at times of the day that may carry greater risk, including playtimes and when pupils arrive at and leave school.
37. Leaders comply with statutory guidance in maintaining accurate admission and attendance registers. They are proactive in promoting the importance of attendance and reflective in identifying and removing barriers to attendance.

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

38. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

39. Leaders promote British values across the school through practical experiences that support pupils' personal development. Staff focus on developing and promoting respect at school, encouraging pupils to interact positively with one another and value differences. Pupils apply the concept of democracy by participating in voting activities, such as choosing which film to watch as an end-of-term treat, which enables them to appreciate the importance of having a voice and making collective decisions. The rule of law is reinforced through clear expectations and consistent consequences, which help pupils to accept responsibility and understand fairness. Individual liberty is promoted through learning about diversity and the importance of respecting others as individuals.
40. Leaders promote pupils' cultural awareness through opportunities to hear about a variety of traditions and experiences. Staff introduce pupils to cultural events such as Chinese New Year, Black History Month, Diwali and Holi, enabling them to develop their understanding of different cultures, celebrations and traditions. Practical experiences, including workshops for African drumming, allow pupils to explore different cultural backgrounds, while shared food experiences, such as Caribbean food provided by a family within the school community, further enrich pupils' understanding of cultural diversity.
41. Leaders make effective use of the local community to enhance pupils' social and personal development. Regular 'community walks' support pupils to engage with the local community and to learn how to interact with people outside of school. Visits to the local park enable pupils to learn how to use shared facilities, such as the paddling pool, and to learn to respect communal spaces. In addition, charitable activities undertaken in support of the local community centre, alongside fundraising events such as NSPCC 'Number Day' and Children in Need, help pupils to understand their role within the wider community and develop a sense of social responsibility.
42. Leaders promote effective careers provision so that pupils are well prepared for life beyond school. They introduce pupils to professional roles such as dentists, hairdressers and doctors so that they understand how different people contribute to society and how these roles may support them in adulthood. Pupils develop skills that prepare them for adulthood through 'life skills' lessons, where they learn about cooking and washing clothes. During 'community walks' pupils learn how to travel on public transport. They further develop their skills through responsibilities within school, such as helping at breakfast club and assisting with photocopying. Pupils follow a national accreditation pathway to build portfolios that successfully support their transitions into post-16 provision or supported employment opportunities. Leaders work closely with families to support informed decisions about future pathways, including careers workshops, visits to potential placements and discussions during EHC plan reviews, particularly when pupils are getting ready to leave school.
43. Leaders introduce economic education effectively through meaningful first-hand experiences that help pupils to develop an understanding of how money is used. Staff support pupils to use Transport for London cards to pay for public transport and money when buying ingredients from the supermarket for cookery activities. These carefully planned activities ensure that economic education is meaningful and relevant to the pupils' developmental stages.

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. Governors maintain robust oversight of safeguarding. They support leaders to ensure that safeguarding is a clear priority for all staff and is embedded effectively across all aspects of school life. Leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of the risks and vulnerabilities faced by pupils who have SEND and ensure that safeguarding arrangements are carefully adapted to meet pupils' individual needs. Policies and procedures are comprehensive, based on relevant statutory guidance and implemented consistently by staff.
46. Leaders provide effective and ongoing safeguarding training for staff. This is delivered initially at induction, when staff receive comprehensive information about statutory guidance and the school's safeguarding procedures. Training is revisited regularly, with particular emphasis on ensuring that staff are adept at observing and interpreting non-verbal behaviours in relation to any safeguarding concerns. As a result of their training, staff are skilled in recognising signs of concern about pupils or adults working at school and know how to act promptly and appropriately.
47. Leaders respond effectively to any safeguarding concerns. They foster open and professional dialogue with external agencies so that they can report concerns and seek appropriate guidance. Leaders ensure that communication between staff is effective by sharing relevant information in a timely and sensitive manner so that pupils are supported. They maintain regular contact with families so that pupils receive co-ordinated support at home and in school. The safeguarding team maintains detailed records, including of any actions taken and the rationale for these. They monitor their actions to ensure that support for pupils remains effective.
48. Leaders closely align their safeguarding practice with the school's wider pastoral systems. This promotes a cohesive approach to supporting pupils' wellbeing. Pupils benefit from nurturing relationships with trusted adults, which enable them to feel secure and well supported. Staff use their in-depth knowledge of pupils to remain vigilant to changes in behaviour that might suggest a pastoral or safeguarding concern. Many pupils also use the AAC system to signal any worries.
49. Leaders ensure that online safety is given appropriate priority within the school's safeguarding arrangements to protect pupils from online harm. Policies and procedures are in place to promote pupils' safe use of technology. Leaders provide suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems which are tested regularly.
50. Leaders and governors ensure that safer recruitment practices are thorough and implemented consistently. They undertake the required pre-employment checks on adults before they commence working at the school and record these accurately on the single central record of appointments (SCR). Those involved in recruitment are suitably trained and understand their responsibilities in promoting pupils' safety and welfare.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Kestrel House School
Department for Education number	309/6002
Address	Kestrel House School 104 Crouch Hill Crouch End London N8 9EA
Phone number	020 8348 8500
Email address	admin@kestrelhouseschool.co.uk
Website	www.kestrelhouseschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Mr Richard Power
Headteacher	Ms Aimee McMillan
Age range	5 to 16
Number of pupils	40
Date of previous inspection	28 to 30 March 2023

Information about the school

52. Kestrel House is an independent co-educational special day school located in Crouch End, London. The school caters for pupils with autism and complex needs. The school is part of Acorn Care and Education Ltd, whose directors provide governance. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed and took up her post in September 2025.
53. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and an education, health and care plan.
54. The school has identified English as an additional language for a very small proportion of pupils.
55. The school states that its aims are to promote the core values of pride, play and preparation for adulthood. It intends for these values to shape the curriculum, relationships and daily practice, so that every pupil is supported to thrive as an individual.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

10 to 12 March 2026

56. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

57. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- discussions with 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.

58. The inspection team considered the views of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

59. The previous inspection of the school was undertaken by Ofsted. This is the school's first inspection by ISI.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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