

School inspection report

11 to 13 November 2025

The Leys School

Trumpington Road

Cambridge

CB2 7AD

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 have an informed oversight of all areas of school life. They ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the regulatory requirements, including those for boarders. Senior leaders communicate regularly with academic staff to ensure that pupils' wellbeing is continuously promoted. Leaders and governors undertake their responsibilities effectively, including those related to health and safety. There is a well-organised approach to risk. At the time of the inspection, two written risk assessments did not reflect the school's effective practice. These were rectified during the inspection.
2. The curriculum and co-curricular programme meet pupils' needs and interests. Subject choices preserve breadth and balance, while allowing specialism at GCSE and in the sixth form. The week is organised so that both day pupils and boarders can commit to a wide range of activities alongside their academic studies. The school's day pupils are fully integrated into a six-day week curriculum. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and plan effective lessons. Pupils are interested in their work and participate with enthusiasm in discussions. The oldest pupils, in Years 11 and 13, attain high standards in their GCSE and A-level qualifications.
3. Leaders have created a high-quality curriculum in art. Teachers are very knowledgeable about the subject across a variety of disciplines, including painting, sculpture, drawing and photography. They provide pupils with guidance, space and resources that enable them to work independently for extended periods of time. Almost all pupils make significant gains in their understanding and application of artistic techniques. They produce remarkably high-quality finished pieces, and almost all achieve examination results at GCSE and A level at the highest possible grade. Many pupils follow art-related courses into post-18 education. The quality of the art curriculum and outcomes for pupils are a significant strength of the school.
4. The school is a highly inclusive environment, which supports pupils to become exceptionally thoughtful and considerate citizens. Leaders invest in listening to the widest range of views about pupils' experiences. They constantly seek the views of pupils who are less heard or represented. Leaders invest in high-quality staff training and specialist speakers so that the delivery of the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum helps pupils to learn important knowledge about those of different faiths, national backgrounds and gender identities. Pupils contribute in a myriad of ways to school life and the local community. They are exceptionally respectful, kind and courteous to others. They actively support one another in a sensitive and considerate way, including through the support of new boarders. The school is a welcoming, vibrant and inclusive environment. This is a significant strength of the school.
5. Boarding provision is effective. Staff are well trained and well informed about boarders' individual needs and wider interests. Tutors provide or identify ways to support pupils with their studies in boarding houses. Extra sessions are on offer during the school day. Accommodation is of good quality and supports boarders to develop independence. Recreational activities in the evenings and weekends are appropriate and well planned. Leaders, through the induction programme for boarders from overseas, identify boarding pupils' pastoral needs and the nature of support required for those who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Leaders and teachers ensure that these needs are met in lessons and support sessions. As a result, pupils who speak EAL make good academic progress and quickly settle socially.

6. Safeguarding arrangements are effective in promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Leaders are especially mindful of the contextual and geographical risks for pupils and boarders. Effective pastoral care ensures that pupils who may be at risk of harm are identified quickly, and that appropriate action is taken. Safeguarding leaders liaise effectively with external agencies when required.

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 those who lead activities more regularly review the suitability of associated risk assessments so that they precisely reflect the effective practice that occurs.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. The governing body has relevant experience and skills and oversees the school's work effectively. Leaders' reports to governors provide appropriate evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness. Governors assure themselves about the reliability of the information provided. They adopt a systematic approach that includes analysing data, spending time in boarding houses, and meeting staff, boarders and day pupils. As a result, the implementation of school policies and procedures is monitored and evaluated effectively, and the school continues to meet the Standards.
8. Leaders have a detailed knowledge of pupils' needs and ambitions. They are actively involved in school life. The school's improvement plan further promotes pupils' wellbeing. This includes the development of digital resources to enhance pupils' learning. Leaders' diligent working relationships with external agencies, such as children's services and the police, mean that additional wellbeing support is accessed, when needed, in a timely and effective way.
9. Academic and pastoral leaders have an informed knowledge of the aptitudes and needs of individual pupils. The three-day induction programme for pupils arriving from overseas enables new boarders to receive individual support while they settle into a new environment and adjust to life in the UK. Appropriate strategies are used to adjust teaching effectively and provide support for pupils who speak EAL.
10. Leaders' decisions are underpinned by the school's value of 'doing good' in many possible ways. They constantly review and work with pupils to identify where they can be even more effective. For example, leaders have devised a structure in which all pupils can present their views, and have implemented new strategies to seek the views of less well-represented groups of pupils, to explore any unidentified prejudice. As a result of leaders' work, pupils are highly supportive of each other. They show high levels of respect for those with, for example, different racial and religious backgrounds or gender identities. Pupils reflect the school's values in their approach to academic work, music and sport, and in the resilience that they show in the many wider opportunities that they embrace, such as the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE).
11. Leaders of boarding provision are knowledgeable and skilled and ensure that boarders receive a high-quality experience. Boarding houses are well staffed. They are warm, welcoming environments in which boarders can build their self-confidence. Leaders have put in place a thoughtfully planned extra-curricular programme, known as the 'wider curriculum', that is responsive to the interests and talents of pupils. Pastoral staff are vigilant to the mental health and wellbeing of boarders and day pupils in their house.
12. Governors and senior leaders have a strategic approach to identifying and managing risk. The school has a suitable policy that sets out approaches to the management of risk to pupils in all areas of school and boarding life. They take account of particular contextual and geographical risks related to the location of the school. Staff are appropriately qualified in the oversight of high-risk activities such as contact sport and adventurous pursuits that occur off site. Most risk assessments are detailed, precise and effective. However, some changes in the identification and mitigation of risk are not always precisely recorded in risk assessments. Amendments were made to a small number of risk assessments during the inspection to ensure that they more accurately reflected the effective practice in the school.

13. The school's website provides accessible and clear information for staff, pupils and parents of both current and prospective pupils. All the required policies and documents are available, including those relating to boarding. The school reports any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition times to the appropriate local authority. They provide local authorities with the required information for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including information related to finance and funding. They provide parents with appropriate regular reporting on the achievement and progress of their child.
14. The school's complaints procedure is appropriate and effective. Parents are encouraged to share concerns with housemasters, housemistresses or senior leaders. All concerns, including at the informal stage, are recorded centrally and reviewed by governors to identify any themes or patterns that require further action.
15. Teachers make appropriate adjustments and regularly check the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders make appropriate adjustments for pupils who have disabilities through an accessibility plan, including strategies to support boarders with physical disabilities. Consequently, the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. The curriculum enables pupils to be world-ready academically, culturally and physically, in line with the school's values. The curriculum supports pupils to have a wide-ranging educational experience. It preserves a balance between creative subjects such as drama, music and art, as well as computer science, technology and the humanities. Most pupils study at least one language, chosen from French, German or Spanish. Alongside core studies of English, mathematics and the sciences, older pupils choose from a broad range of subjects to study for GCSE qualifications in Years 10 and 11, and a wide array of A levels in the sixth form.
18. The curriculum enables pupils to develop a wide range of specific interests in art and technology. Pupils develop design skills and create projects using a variety of materials at GCSE. Leaders provide pupils following examination courses in art with uninterrupted periods to produce examination pieces. Finished work reflects their high level of skills in different media, for example painting, printing and photography. Almost all pupils achieve the highest possible grades at GCSE and A level, and the large majority follow art-based courses in higher education.
19. Leaders invest in providing a curriculum that supports pupils' wider interests and personal development. The school's leadership programme ensures that pupils take part in community service and provides older pupils with opportunities to develop skills outside taught lessons, for example through DofE and CCF, or sport. Leaders also invest in opportunities to stimulate pupils' interests, for example through academic societies such as philosophy and theology, and by entry into mathematics and science Olympiads and other academic competitions. Many pupils gain additional accreditation and awards.
20. Lessons are thoughtfully planned with an informed understanding of pupils' aptitudes and needs. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They explain difficult concepts with clarity. They appropriately use a range of good-quality resources to support pupil's learning, particularly in art, technology, science and sport. Teachers provide regular feedback on pupils' written work and work produced in lessons, including through one-to-one support for individuals. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on the quality of their work beyond the context of examination requirements. As a result, pupils behave well in lessons, are interested in their work and enthusiastically contribute their views or questions. They respond positively to intellectual challenge.
21. Leaders identify the support needed for pupils who have SEND before or shortly after they join the school. Teachers are provided with detailed information about pupils' needs and plan lessons accordingly. Almost all support for pupils is provided in lessons. Teachers provide additional sessions in nearly every subject. Consequently, pupils who have SEND are well supported, learn and achieve well.
22. Although there are several pupils who speak EAL, only a very small number of pupils who arrive at the school are in the early stages of learning English. When needed, there is a structured approach to identifying pupils' linguistic skills, including the additional requirements of boarders. Leaders use this information to provide effective support in classrooms and, via specialist staff, through intervention. Pupils quickly acquire reading, writing and communication skills sufficient to access the curriculum and school life effectively.

23. Academic leaders have embedded a framework to evaluate individual pupils' progress relative to their starting points. Teachers have an accurate and up-to-date awareness of pupils' achievement. They base this on regular checks and discussions with pupils so that any gaps in learning are addressed quickly. Academic leaders communicate daily with house tutors. As a result, tutors provide or identify support for boarders. Pupils make good progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding. They learn and attain well. For example, pupils typically attain high grades across a range of subjects at GCSE and A level.
24. Pupils' emotional, social and creative skills are further promoted through an extensive range of sporting and wider-curricular activities that are planned throughout the week, including at weekends and in boarding. Leaders encourage pupils to take advantage of the rich cultural opportunities in Cambridge. Leaders provide a stimulating environment that allows pupils space to study, reflect and relax, which is enhanced by the abundance of pupils' art in classrooms, boarding houses and corridors.

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

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

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

26. Pupils' social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing are exceptionally well supported. Leaders have structured a curriculum that enables pupils to develop their interests and explore new areas. They have designed the school day so that both day pupils and boarders have time to study, relax and cultivate new skills, while building confidence and self-esteem. Pupils are encouraged to be reflective about their work and their place in the world. Pupils engage in worship in Chapel and participate in singing as a community-enhancing activity. Pupils of different faiths have times and space to pray. Staff and senior pupils promote the school's values in their interactions with other pupils. Boarders support each other but are aware of the need for private space and time. They are encouraged to learn from others who have different national, ethnic or religious backgrounds.
27. The collective work of leaders to support pupils' social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing creates a highly respectful environment where pupils are kind, thoughtful and considerate of one another. Pupils take responsibility for their actions. Leaders set clear expectations in the school's behaviour policy. Sanctions are understood by pupils and staff but rarely needed. The school and boarding provision are harmonious and calm environments.
28. Leaders have established and implemented an effective policy and approach to anti-bullying. Leaders and pupils work together to promote pupils' awareness of possible bullying behaviours. They have surveyed pupils' attitudes and experiences and shared the results in assemblies. Leaders promote the importance of kindness in pupils' relationships with each other. For example, pupils are alert to the possible consequences of inadvertent comments and unconscious characterisation of those from different national backgrounds. Incidents of bullying are rare.
29. Leaders plan and implement an appropriate PSHE curriculum, including all required aspects of relationship and sex education (RSE). Leaders organise training for staff so that individual teachers become specialists in particular areas of the PSHE curriculum. Leaders provide material for discussion in house meetings to reinforce key messages. Assemblies, PSHE sessions and external lectures promote debate about wider moral issues. Older pupils contribute to the PSHE curriculum through presentations in assembly, for example about respect or anti-bullying strategies. Pupils of all ages develop an age-appropriate understanding of important content, such as healthy relationships, and share their views confidently.
30. There is a well-planned and delivered physical education (PE) curriculum. Pupils are taught the importance of physical exercise for their wellbeing through the sports curriculum and outdoor education opportunities. Teams and individual pupils are successful in regional and national competitions. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to develop skills in, for example, rock climbing, squash and dance. Pupils swim regularly. Boarders and day pupils eat healthily in the school's dining room. They are taught about the importance of a healthy lifestyle and nutrition.
31. The school's medical centre is well appointed. Qualified staff are available throughout the school day and at night. Nursing staff liaise closely with house matrons to ensure a consistent approach to managing any medical issues, including the administration of medicines.
32. Boarding houses provide accommodation suitable for pupils' ages and gender. Boarders have room in which to study and relax. Bedrooms are comfortable and provide privacy and adequate storage

space. Boarders can make snacks and drinks and can contact home when necessary. There are effective methods through which boarders can discuss boarding issues with staff.

33. The school's site is well maintained. Regular maintenance checks are carried out in school buildings, outside areas, boarding houses and other buildings. Appropriate records are kept. Health and safety protocols are effectively implemented and include those related to fire safety and security. Evacuation procedures are regularly practised, including during times when all boarders are in their houses. Pupils and boarders are well supervised at all times.

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

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

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

35. Staff, leaders and pupils promote respect for those of different race, faith and gender identity. Assemblies and the PSHE curriculum highlight the need to avoid unconscious assumption or bias in language. For example, a presentation drew attention to the media focus on the gender of the new archbishop, and another to the misuse of terms related to autism. Through activities such as assemblies and chapel services, leaders actively and continually promote principles that encourage pupils to reflect on their attitudes and to respect and support others. The pupils' school council focuses on representing the views of all pupils, including those in less well-represented groups. Leaders have created an international committee which allows boarders from overseas to share their experience or concerns and provide views on the required improvements in aspects of their boarding life.
36. Pupils take opportunities to help and serve others in the school and local community, developing their leadership and communication skills. Senior pupils are highly supportive of younger boarders. They help in their academic work or provide perspectives on choices at GCSE, A level or in the wider curriculum. Many pupils are also involved in local environmental and sustainability projects, for example recommissioning old bicycles and working in local country parks. Pupils lead sports activities in primary schools and football clubs. A group is helping to decorate a children's ward at Addenbrookes Hospital. Older pupils work in local care homes for the elderly and in charity shops. A significant number of pupils achieve gold in the DofE scheme.
37. The PSHE programme includes careers education appropriate to pupils' ages. Pupils use software that provides psychometric testing alongside extensive careers and subject libraries, helping them to independently gather specific information about potential choices after school. Pupils are made aware of the world of work through an extensive variety of visiting speakers. Tutors work with careers leaders in overseeing careers guidance for individual pupils. They ensure that pupils are directed to specialist advice. Pupils are well supported to make informed decisions about their next steps in education, training and employment.
38. Pupils' economic understanding and learning related to personal finance begins in Year 7. By the end of Year 11, pupils have developed a sound understanding of a range of topics, for example credit and borrowing, tax and mortgages. This programme of learning extends further for the oldest pupils in the sixth form, through visiting speakers who help them to develop their understanding of international financial issues, for example the imposition of tariffs on trade.
39. Leaders identify opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding and respect for important values, such as the democratic process. Many pupils take part in debates. Pupils gain an understanding of different forms of democracy through mock elections modelled on the UK and USA voting systems. Through a range of subjects, pupils explore the role of civil and criminal law, for example in an analysis of whether Claudius was a king or politician in a study of *Hamlet* in English.
40. Pupils behave with empathy and understanding towards each other. Leaders encourage pupils to reflect on their behaviour, thinking about the difference between right and wrong. They are responsible young people who have an ingrained understanding that they should look out for ways of 'doing good', in line with the school's ethos. They listen to the views of others and use them to adjust their own perspectives.

41. Teachers avoid any political bias, for example in English lessons when discussing the parallels between George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and a communist society. They take opportunities to promote and discuss British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs. Leaders are researching how pupils might use artificial intelligence to support their work. Pupils talk about aspects of misinformation and fake news. As a result, pupils develop a balanced perspective of the world that prepares them effectively for the responsibilities of living in society.

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

42. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

43. Safeguarding procedures are implemented effectively so that the wellbeing of both boarders and day pupils is promoted and supported. The safeguarding policy and process are in line with latest statutory guidance.
44. Leaders regularly review their effectiveness and where they can improve provision. For instance, they have commissioned an external audit of safeguarding with the objective of further strengthening the arrangements. As a result, the safeguarding team has been expanded to provide greater support for safeguarding leaders.
45. Well-trained governors oversee the implementation of safeguarding arrangements effectively. They review records, hold discussions with staff, track pupils during the school day and visit boarding houses. They maintain an informed oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements. Governors provide professional challenge to safeguarding leaders. This ensures that the required procedures and protocols are followed.
46. Staff receive frequent and detailed safeguarding training, including in preventing the risk of radicalisation and in countering extremism. Leaders keep an accurate register of training provided and who has attended. Safeguarding leaders adapt their training to the specific needs and roles of staff, such as those with responsibilities in boarding provision.
47. Staff quickly notice changes in behaviour or signs of concern among pupils and boarders. Staff share concerns with senior leaders to ensure that pupils are appropriately supported. Records are up to date and thorough, and detail how concerns are followed up, notes of any action taken, decisions reached and outcomes. Action taken is monitored and evaluated. Boarding staff work closely with other safeguarding leaders and, when appropriate, with medical staff, so that support for individual pupils promotes their emotional and physical wellbeing.
48. Safeguarding leaders engage regularly with local safeguarding partners, including children's services and, when necessary, the police or mental health teams. Leaders and staff seek immediate advice if needed. They understand their role in reporting any person to relevant regulatory bodies, as required. The low-level concerns procedures work effectively. Staff are aware of the increased risk associated with a boarding community in a city centre.
49. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including online. There are high levels of adult presence during the school day and evening and an array of adults that pupils report any concerns to, such as safeguarding leaders, housemasters and housemistresses, tutors, the chaplaincy team, nurses and matrons. Boarders are regularly made aware of the identity and contact details of people independent of the school that they can speak with if they are worried or have concerns.
50. Leaders have introduced and implemented effective internet filtering and monitoring procedures to prevent access to inappropriate material online and on digital devices. Website and other online use by staff and pupils is closely monitored and action is taken swiftly where needed. Governors regularly review and test the effectiveness of the arrangements.
51. All required pre-employment recruitment checks are undertaken on governors, staff, volunteers and visiting speakers, according to their role. The information is recorded accurately in the school's single central record of appointments (SCR). Admissions staff check the suitability of guardians.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

52. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	The Leys School
Department for Education number	873/6003
Registered charity number	1144035
Address	The Leys School Trumpington Road Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB2 7AD
Phone number	01223 508900
Email address	office@theleys.net
Website	www.theleys.net
Proprietor	The Leys and St Faiths Schools Foundation
Chair	Sir Matthew Rycroft
Headteacher	Dr Clare Ives
Age range	11 to 19
Number of pupils	564
Number of boarding pupils	354
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 November 2025

Information about the school

53. The Leys School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged 11 to 19. It is located on one site in the centre of Cambridge, with some additional nearby sporting facilities within walking distance of the school. The school is controlled by a board of trustees and directors of The Leys and St Faith's School Foundation. There is a local governing body that advises the trustee board.
54. Boarders and day boarders are accommodated in eight boarding houses on or near the main school site: one for female and male boarders aged 11 to 12 years old; three for male boarders aged 13 to 18 years old; two for female boarders aged 13 to 18 years old; one for male boarders aged 16 to 18 years old; and one for female boarders aged 16 to 18 years old.
55. The school has identified 182 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small proportion of pupils have an education, health and care plan.
56. The school has identified English as an additional language for 133 pupils.
57. The school states its aims are to seek, in the spirit of its Methodist founders and its Christian values, to send pupils out into the world ready – academically, culturally, morally, physically, spiritually and socially – to live fulfilling lives which will make a positive contribution to society.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

11 to 13 November 2025

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

59. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- 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**.

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