

School inspection report

10 to 12 February 2026

Appleford School

Elston Lane

Shrewton

Salisbury

SP3 4HL

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. The proprietor and advisory board provide clear strategic oversight of the school, ensuring resources, specialist staffing and leadership meet pupils' needs and support their wellbeing. Leaders, through consistent practice, ensure that the Standards are met.
2. At the beginning of the inspection, school leaders had not made previous inspection reports available to parents of current and prospective pupils as required. The policy on attendance did not fully reflect current statutory guidance. These omissions were corrected during the inspection.
3. Leaders support pupils to achieve academically and personally through an appropriate curriculum. Pupils build positive relationships in school, develop their communication skills and grow in confidence. Decision-making by leaders ensures a purposeful learning environment that provides appropriate and effective education for pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
4. Across the school, teachers routinely check pupils' understanding and provide helpful verbal feedback. Typically, pupils make good progress. However, in some lessons teachers do not consistently adapt their teaching to meet pupils' differing needs, with the result that some pupils do not receive the support they require, and others are not sufficiently challenged. In these lessons, progress is more limited.
5. Leaders provide a broad curriculum and a range of activities, including specialist pathways in creative and digital subjects such as art, photography and graphic design, alongside the citizenship programme. As a result, pupils discover and develop individual talents, build confidence and independence as learners, and apply creative skills in meaningful, practical ways.
6. Pupils in the prep school benefit from learning in a nurturing environment which has a clear focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy. Classroom assistants, specialist therapists and targeted one-to-one teaching support pupils effectively, particularly those who need additional help with communication, language and learning skills. Pupils build secure foundations in reading, writing and numeracy, developing confidence and positive attitudes to learning.
7. An emerging whole-school academic tracking system provides leaders with oversight of progress to support pupil review meetings. As a result, teachers can identify additional needs and provide more academically focused, individualised support that improves pupils' outcomes.
8. Pupils learn to respect difference and protected characteristics, developing tolerance and empathy, and increasing self-knowledge through the curriculum and daily interactions. Staff create a safe, inclusive culture where pupils are encouraged to talk openly about past experiences. Pupils feel listened to and accepted for who they are. Pupils grow in confidence and build resilience, so that they form positive friendships and engage in lessons.
9. Careers education helps pupils to make informed choices about next steps, including vocational and sixth-form pathways. Pupils learn practical economic and life skills, such as budgeting and financial decision-making, which increases their independence. As a result, pupils are well prepared for adulthood. Pupils move on to appropriate destinations with clear aspirations and improved skills.

10. Safeguarding is effective and leaders work with external agencies and local authorities to promote pupils' safety and welfare. Pupils know who to speak to and feel confident that concerns are taken seriously and acted upon promptly. This secure culture enables pupils to attend regularly, participate fully in learning and recreation, and develop trust in the adults who support them.
11. Leaders identify potentially vulnerable pupils promptly and prioritise the support they receive, drawing on specialist therapists where appropriate. Staff develop strategies and co-ordinate support to address emotional regulation, communication and social needs. Consequently, pupils develop greater self-awareness, feel more settled and understood, and build confidence in managing relationships and learning demands. This support helps pupils to engage in lessons and make progress academically and personally.

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 all previous inspection reports are made available to parents of current and prospective pupils
- ensure that teaching is consistently adapted to support specific pupils' needs so that all pupils are given the opportunity to extend their learning and make good progress
- ensure that the attendance policy fully reflects current statutory guidance.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. The proprietor and advisory board ensure leaders have the knowledge and skills to carry out their roles effectively. Through systematic oversight of leaders' work, they assure themselves that the curriculum, policies and procedures are implemented consistently to promote the wellbeing of pupils. Leaders ensure that the school fosters a nurturing, inclusive environment, focusing on academic confidence, mutual respect and holistic development for pupils, all of whom have SEND.
13. Leaders foster a positive culture where pupils share their individual needs with teachers. Pupils develop resilience when faced with challenges, and learning support therapists respond to their individual needs. Leaders promote a kind and supportive school community where everybody is valued.
14. Leaders promote a respectful and inclusive environment which enables pupils to feel safe and supported in school and make progress. Leaders with pastoral responsibility have appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Their supportive approach enables pupils to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem.
15. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, including local authorities and educational psychologists, to secure specialist advice and appropriate support to meet pupils' learning needs. As a result, pupils who have additional needs, including those who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), receive co-ordinated provision and make good progress. Leaders provide the relevant local authority with all required information relating to the provision of funded pupils who have an EHC plan.
16. Leaders provide parents with a range of useful information through the school's website, newsletters and the school portal. Although some previous inspection reports were initially missing from the website, this was rectified during the inspection. Parents receive written progress reports and attend parents' meetings so that they are well informed about the progress their child is making. Each pupil undergoes regular progress evaluation in collaboration with the learning support department, ensuring that additional needs are supported, identified and appropriately addressed.
17. Teaching and learning initiatives have been implemented successfully. The timetable has been redesigned to develop pupils' study skills and broaden their educational experience through daily physical education (PE), a structured programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and a weekly co-curricular afternoon. During this time, pupils develop wider skills and resilience through outdoor activities such as shelter-building, safe fire-lighting, teamwork and problem-solving, alongside competitive team sports that build fitness and collaboration.
18. The school has an effective complaints policy that sets out a clear process with appropriate timescales. Any concerns raised by parents are followed up promptly, and any formal complaints are managed in line with the policy to ensure that issues are investigated. Leaders maintain thorough records of complaints, including outcomes, communication with parents, and any lessons learned or actions taken as a result. The proprietor is kept informed of complaints received and uses this oversight to ensure that issues raised contribute to leaders' ongoing review and improvement of the school's systems, policies and procedures.
19. The school's accessibility plan is reviewed regularly. Leaders routinely evaluate pupils' needs and remove barriers where possible so that all pupils can access the curriculum, including trips, activities

and clubs. In doing so, leaders demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and effectively fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

20. Leaders manage risk effectively and take a thorough approach to keeping pupils and staff safe. Risk assessments are detailed and cover the full range of on-site routines, activities and educational visits. These are reviewed regularly and updated accordingly, and leaders ensure that appropriate measures are in place so that risks are reduced to a minimum. For example, they have redesigned the car park and driveway to ensure safe pick-up and drop-off arrangements.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. Leaders implement an appropriate and carefully sequenced curriculum that considers the needs and abilities of all pupils. Teachers support pupils to ensure a successful transition when they join the school and help them to build confidence as learners. In the prep school, reading is prioritised and targeted interventions for individuals help pupils to make progress. Pupils engage positively with their learning and develop increasing independence. The range of GCSE and BTEC options available gives pupils flexibility to pursue their interests, and pupils achieve well in these qualifications, ensuring that they are well prepared for sixth-form study and vocational courses.
23. Staff assess pupils' academic starting points when they join the school, drawing on EHC plans and baseline assessments. Pupils receive effective and co-ordinated support. The learning support department, which includes speech and language and occupational therapists, works closely with staff to identify appropriate targets, and strategies for each pupil. Therapists provide extensive one-to-one and small-group support that develops pupils' communication, sensory and physical skills, and promotes their confidence and wellbeing. As a result, pupils develop greater self-esteem and emotional literacy as they progress through the school and engage positively with their learning.
24. Teachers use their subject knowledge and enthusiasm to engage pupils in lessons. For example, in Year 10 photography, art and graphics lessons, pupils work on highly personalised coursework, such as artist research, image manipulation and product photography. Teachers target support to develop technique and subject vocabulary so that pupils learn to refine and improve their work. As a result, pupils demonstrate high levels of independence, creativity and sustained motivation, producing diverse and high-quality outcomes. In Year 4, pupils contribute confidently to discussions about a museum visit and Victorian simulation day in school. They engage enthusiastically, making thoughtful comparisons with modern life and developing their historical understanding.
25. Teachers typically plan lessons that enable pupils to build securely on their prior knowledge and develop their understanding over time. However, some teachers do not consistently adapt their classroom practice or follow agreed strategies to meet the full range of pupils' needs. As a result, in these lessons some pupils are not stretched sufficiently and others find tasks less accessible, which can lead to reduced engagement and more limited progress.
26. Teachers provide personalised verbal feedback in lessons, helping pupils to understand what they have done well and what they need to improve. For example, in Year 8 food and nutrition, teachers break down complex language so pupils can access key concepts and deepen their knowledge and understanding. As a result, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, reflect on feedback, and make improvements to their work.
27. Teachers use a range of assessment information, including regular topic tests and half-termly checks, to identify what pupils know and to set appropriate targets. Leaders have recently introduced a new whole-school tracking programme to provide a clearer and more consistent picture of pupils' attainment and progress, including alignment between the prep and senior school assessment frameworks. The learning support department is central to this work and reviews information alongside subject leaders, helping to ensure that pupils' individual needs are identified.
28. Leaders provide pupils with a suitable programme of recreational activities. The programme encourages pupils to try new experiences and broaden their skills. Opportunities include

participation in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE), where pupils build resilience, self-discipline and leadership through shared goals and challenges. In the prep school, conservation activities such as discovering local wildlife, installing wildlife feeders and working towards conservation awards help pupils to develop an appreciation of the natural environment. These varied experiences support pupils' confidence, independence and wellbeing and enable them to form positive friendships as they work together towards a common goal.

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

29. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

30. Relationships across the school are inclusive and respectful. Pupils are polite and thoughtful and demonstrate positive attitudes towards their studies. Pupils are well known and valued by staff and, as a result, they recognise that they belong in this community, in contrast with feelings of isolation they may have experienced in previous settings. Pupils are accepted for who they are and speak openly and confidently about their specific learning needs.
31. Teachers actively support pupils' emotional wellbeing by reinforcing strategies that help pupils to recognise and regulate their feelings. Staff make it clear who pupils can speak to and how they can seek help when they feel worried or unhappy. Pupils use practical techniques such as nature walks and breathing exercises to support their wellbeing.
32. Leaders provide pupils with meaningful opportunities to deepen their spirituality and understanding of Christian values through the work of the chaplain and a programme of whole-school assemblies. Assemblies are rooted in the school's ethos and encourage pupils to reflect on faith-informed values such as kindness, compassion, forgiveness and inclusion. For example, an assembly on friendship draws on Christian teaching about loving and caring for others, helping pupils to consider the importance of relationships and what it means to be a good friend in daily school life.
33. The PSHE programme is embedded within the curriculum. Teachers deliver age-appropriate content that reflects pupils' needs. In the prep school, pupils learn about social media and age limits, so they understand responsible online behaviour. In the senior school, pupils develop a deeper understanding of respectful behaviour and strategies for managing disagreements. As a result, pupils are able to make informed choices, communicate respectfully and build positive relationships with others.
34. The relationships and sex education (RSE) programme reflects the requirements of current statutory guidance. Pupils learn about the physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes associated with adolescence and puberty. They also learn about different types of healthy respectful relationships and the importance of consent and respecting privacy. Pupils are able to understand the meaning of consent and are aware that it must be freely given and can be withdrawn.
35. Behaviour management is underpinned by clear expectations and consistent routines. Staff address incidents promptly so that concerns are resolved swiftly and fairly. Leaders reinforce positive conduct through regular assemblies that promote the school's values and tackle issues such as unkindness or bullying directly. Staff celebrate positive behaviour through reward points and house competitions, which encourage pupils to make good choices.
36. The PE curriculum promotes pupils' physical and mental health through daily activity. Pupils participate regularly in a range of competitive team sports, including rugby, netball, hockey and football, and many represent the school in fixtures. Pupils take on roles such as sports leaders, which develop responsibility, leadership and confidence. As a result, pupils develop positive habits and a strong sense of belonging to the school community.
37. Leaders promote a systematic approach to health and safety. Fire safety equipment is checked and serviced regularly, and leaders carry out termly fire drills. Fire risk assessments are reviewed and

used to produce clear action plans, for example the replacement of fire doors. Health and safety leaders respond promptly to concerns and keep detailed records of actions taken. As a result, leaders maintain safe and secure premises where risks are minimised.

38. The school provides suitable first aid and medical provision. Staff undertake appropriate first aid training so that support is available across the school day. Leaders use individual pupil risk assessments, informed by EHC plans, to ensure specific pupils' medical needs are understood.
39. The school records all required admission and attendance information appropriately. Daily registration is completed in line with statutory guidance, and leaders follow up promptly on any absence. Leaders inform the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points. However, at the start of the inspection, the published attendance policy did not accurately reflect current government guidance and did not clearly set out the school's procedures for parents requesting leave during term time.

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

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

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

41. Pupils learn about different cultures, languages and religions, and this curriculum content promotes an inclusive community and reinforces mutual respect. Teachers plan structured opportunities for discussion, using stories and real-life case studies to help pupils explore different perspectives and talk sensitively about issues such as identity, discrimination and fairness. Staff model respectful language and guide pupils to consider the impact of their words and actions, including through restorative conversations when disagreements occur. As a result, pupils develop empathy and contribute to a school culture where everyone feels valued and included.
42. The school promotes a supportive atmosphere in which pupils develop moral understanding. Through the PSHE programme and weekly tutorials, teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to explore moral dilemmas in an age-appropriate way, including issues such as peer pressure, discrimination, honesty, consent and respectful online behaviour. Discussions are carefully structured, so pupils learn to listen to others, consider different viewpoints and reflect on the impact of their choices on themselves and those around them.
43. Leaders ensure that the PSHE curriculum is adapted carefully to reflect pupils' developmental stages and learning needs, so that sensitive themes are taught in an age-appropriate and accessible way. For example, in Year 8 PSHE, pupils explore issues such as sexism, gender identity and bias and then revisit these topics at a more complex level in Years 10 and 11. Teachers guide discussion thoughtfully and help pupils to recognise discrimination. Pupils build empathy and the confidence to discuss differences effectively.
44. The school promotes British values and provides pupils with regular opportunities to gain an impartial understanding of democracy and key institutions. Through the curriculum and wider school experiences, pupils learn how laws are made and how citizens can contribute to public life. Younger pupils begin to explore the role of Parliament, developing an early understanding of representation and decision-making. In the senior school, pupils deepen this knowledge through topics such as the women's suffrage movement, prompting thoughtful discussion about women's rights and change over time. Pupils discuss social and political issues respectfully and build their understanding of rights and responsibilities.
45. Economic and financial education is integrated effectively within the PSHE curriculum and is reinforced through practical experiences in school life. In the senior school, pupils learn about key aspects of personal finance, including budgeting, the cost of living, mortgages and how to make informed choices about managing money. In the prep school, pupils apply financial skills through activities such as the fundraising club, where they plan events, run bake sales and practise handling, sorting and counting money. As they progress through the school, pupils develop greater financial awareness, enabling them to make informed decisions associated with managing money.
46. The careers programme is planned effectively and supports pupils to make informed choices about future pathways, including vocational routes and sixth-form study. Pupils learn about a range of options, including apprenticeships, A levels and vocational choices. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are prepared well for employment and further study through practical support, including mock interviews. Pupils' build confidence and employability skills, which support successful progression.

47. The school provides pupils with opportunities to take part in charitable and community fundraising activities. Pupils engage in practical projects that support others locally and internationally, for example through visiting a partner school in Kenya, where pupils contribute to improving the environment by painting classrooms, laying paths and supporting food preparation. Whole-school initiatives, including a long-distance walking challenge, further develop pupils' character as they push themselves physically, work together and encourage one another to persevere.
48. Pupils take on a range of leadership roles, including prefect responsibilities, heads of school and roles within the citizenship programme. The school council provides an effective forum where pupils discuss and contribute to school improvement, such as plans for renovating changing rooms and reviewing the lunchtime choices. These opportunities develop pupils' confidence and communication skills and help to shape positive change within the school community.

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

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

Safeguarding

50. Leaders maintain an attentive safeguarding culture across the school, underpinned by clear systems and secure accountability. The safeguarding policy is detailed, kept under regular review and implemented consistently. The proprietor and advisory board provide effective oversight through routine visits, meetings with the safeguarding team, and purposeful discussions with pupils and staff to test how well safeguarding arrangements are implemented. Safeguarding procedures are managed well and align with current statutory guidance, supporting a safe and well-ordered environment for pupils.
51. Staff receive regular safeguarding training, including a comprehensive induction programme for new staff. Update training includes content about exploitation, online safety and risks for pre-adolescent pupils. Staff understand and adhere to the school's reporting systems, passing on any pastoral and safeguarding concerns about pupils promptly. Leaders meet weekly to review ongoing safeguarding matters and agree actions.
52. Staff understand the importance of professional behaviour as outlined in their code of conduct. They report any concerns they have about adults in the school environment, including low-level concerns.
53. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are appropriately trained for their roles. The members of the safeguarding team meet weekly and develop clear action plans to ensure that concerns are discussed thoroughly, decisions are followed through and systems remain responsive. They maintain constructive links with external agencies, including regular contact with the local authority safeguarding team, and they make referrals when required in a timely fashion. Safeguarding records are detailed and well organised, with concerns and actions logged securely in line with statutory guidance.
54. Pupils understand who to speak to if they have concerns. They know they can approach trusted adults, including their tutor, teachers, the safeguarding team and therapists. Safeguarding leaders support pupils with walks around the school, checking they feel safe in school and identifying any emerging concerns that need to be followed up. Pupils benefit from regular guidance on wellbeing and self-regulation, for example through tutor time discussions, which helps them to explain how they are feeling and to request support when needed. These systems, alongside timely responses to concerns recorded, help pupils to feel safe, listened to and well supported, enabling them to engage more confidently in school life.
55. Pupils are taught how to use the internet responsibly through PSHE and dedicated online safety talks across year groups. Recent lessons and assemblies develop pupils' understanding of safe online communication, recognising and reporting harmful or toxic behaviours. They also learn about the importance of age restrictions and responsible use of social media, including how images can be altered or misused. The school's internet filtering and monitoring systems are robust and generate alerts that are sent directly to safeguarding leaders, who investigate promptly, speak with pupils when required and record actions.
56. Leaders complete all required safer recruitment checks before adults begin work at the school and record these systematically on a detailed and well-maintained single central record of appointments (SCR). Recruitment processes are organised and secure, with clear oversight to ensure that all checks

are completed. Staff involved in recruitment receive appropriate training, which supports consistent practice and helps to ensure that safeguarding remains central to all appointment decisions.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

57. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Appleford School
Department for Education number	865/6008
Address	Appleford School Elston Lane Shrewton Salisbury Wiltshire SP3 4HL
Phone number	01980 621020
Email address	secretary@appleford.wilts.sch.uk
Website	www.applefordschool.org
Proprietor	Dr Peter Gardner
Headteacher	Mr David King
Age range	7 to 16
Number of pupils	126
Date of previous inspection	4 February 2025

Information about the school

58. Appleford School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school located in rural Wiltshire. It is a specialist school which caters for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, in particular, dyslexia and associated co-occurring conditions. It is a proprietorial school, with a Christian ethos. The school is divided into two sections: a prep school, for pupils aged 7 to 13; and a senior school, for pupils aged 13 to 16.
59. The school accommodates boarders. Boarding provision is inspected separately by Ofsted and was not included in this inspection.
60. The school has identified all pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are 109 pupils in the school who have an education, health and care plan.
61. There are no pupils for whom the school has identified English as an additional language.
62. The school states its aims are to provide a high-quality education for pupils who have dyslexia and associated learning difficulties. The school is committed to preparing pupils for successful adult lives and, as such, encourages a broad and holistic concept of education, aiming to provide small classes and individualised and differentiated teaching, delivered by well-qualified and experienced teaching and learning support staff.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

10 to 12 February 2026

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

64. 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.

65. The inspection team considered the views of pupils. Members of staff and parents 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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