

School inspection report

14 to 17 April 2026

Gresham's School

Cromer Road

Holt

NR25 6EA

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 consistently meeting the regulatory requirements, including those for pupils in the early years setting and boarding accommodation.
2. Governors have a comprehensive and up-to-date register of risks to pupils' wellbeing. They implement and regularly evaluate measures to decrease the likelihood and impact of risk-related incidents.
3. The curriculum for children in the early years is highly coherent, ambitious and responsive to children's interests, developmental stages and emerging needs. Children make good progress from their starting points in their capacity to explore and confront new challenges. As a result, they leave Reception well-prepared for entering Year 1.
4. The prep and senior school curriculums provide a wide breadth of choice, particularly in the sixth form. The creative arts curriculum is a significant strength. Leaders promote the development of pupils' creative skills in all subject areas and in a range of initiatives. Pupils can take courses in an extensive range of arts-related subjects. Pupils of all ages produce very high-quality art and creative pieces. They are successful in public examinations and national competitions, and a high proportion study linked areas after leaving school. Pupils contribute substantially to local arts projects.
5. The taught curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of co-curricular opportunities. Pupils of all ages use the school's sports fields, outdoor areas and facilities effectively to develop their skills and confidence.
6. Teachers have appropriate subject knowledge. They plan lessons to ensure that pupils make good progress in lessons. Teachers use productive strategies in lessons to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress.
7. The effective personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme is supported by discussions with house staff and in chapel services.
8. Pupils receive careers and higher education advice appropriate for their age. They learn about relevant aspects of finance ready for leaving school. Pupils in Year 11 and below do not routinely have access to work experience.
9. Pupils show respect for those of different faiths, national backgrounds and gender. Male and female pupils, boarders and day pupils enjoy equal opportunities.
10. The school's behaviour policy and anti-bullying strategy are effective. Expectations are understood by staff and pupils. Pupils are well behaved. They respect the arrangements to make the school a mobile phone-free environment. Bullying is rare and, when it does occur, it is addressed effectively by pastoral leaders.
11. Buildings and grounds are well maintained. Any potential risks to pupils are minimised through the systematic detailed checks of health and safety and fire procedures. Leaders prioritise the on-site security of all pupils throughout the day and night.

12. Pupils recognise the value of service to others, including in their commitment to volunteering in the local area. They are supportive of each other in boarding houses. School structures and the approachability of house staff and senior leaders ensure that the views of pupils are heard.
13. Safeguarding arrangements are effective in promoting the pupils' wellbeing. Leaders are especially mindful of the additional risks for boarders and children in the early years. Pupils who may be at risk of harm are identified quickly, and appropriate action is taken. Safeguarding leaders liaise effectively with external agencies when required. Leaders have a systematic approach to check that staff are suitable to work with children.

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:

- increase opportunities for pupils in Years 9 to 11 to directly experience the workplace so that they can make informed choices about their careers.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

14. Governors are successful in checking that leaders are meeting Standards effectively and consistently. They regularly review and adjust their management of risks to pupils' wellbeing. Governors achieve this through an organised evaluation of all areas of school life. They assess possible unintended consequences in decisions they make. They gather evidence through surveys and informal discussions with the pupils, staff and parents. They follow a planned programme of visits to boarding houses. They have a detailed knowledge of health and safety issues and ensure that facilities are well maintained and up to date. This has included, for example, the rebuilding of the prep school on the senior school site. As a result, governors make decisions that actively promote the wellbeing of children and pupils.
15. Leaders plan with a clear objective of improving pupils' experience of all areas of school life. They have successfully implemented a strategy to continue to improve the levels of pupils' academic performance. They draw on evidence from case studies from across the world.
16. Senior leaders have secure knowledge in their areas of responsibility and apply it effectively. They have appointed leaders with the skills to develop the monitoring of the impact of the curriculum and teaching in improving pupils' progress. They regularly scrutinise pupils' work. They use data to reassure themselves that good levels of progress are being maintained. Senior leaders evaluate the impact of the arrangements to support pupils who have SEND.
17. Leaders in the prep and senior school have successfully promoted the emotional welfare of pupils through powerful initiatives in mental health education and other curricular programmes. Leaders foster effective links with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils. In particular, there is an open working relationship with local safeguarding partners. Leaders act on the advice given. Governors oversee safeguarding arrangements through regular contact with safeguarding teams, discussions with pupils and reviews of documentation, including the rationale for any decisions and actions.
18. Leaders provide pupils with a range of professionals from whom they can seek advice or with whom they can share concerns. These include specialist nursing staff. Professionals liaise effectively with each other. This ensures that the needs of pupils are well known and, where appropriate, shared with teachers.
19. The school's website provides clear and accessible information for pupils and parents of both current and prospective pupils. This includes all the policies and documents required, including those relating to the early years and boarding. Parents receive annual reports and other frequent information about their child's progress. Leaders provide the local authority with all required information in relation to any pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHCP plan) whom they fund. The school informs the local authority about any pupils who leave or join at non-standard transition points.
20. The school's complaints procedure is in line with requirements. It encourages parents to share concerns with academic, pastoral or senior leaders. All concerns, including at the informal stage, are recorded in detail, with an accurate chronology. The school follows exactly its published procedures if complaints move to the formal stages. Records are stored centrally, and leaders and governors regularly review these to identify any themes or patterns.

21. Leaders make appropriate arrangements for those with a disability through an accessibility plan. For example, a stairlift is available in the pre-prep building. Teachers use technology to assist pupils, for example voice recognition and tactile and tonal markings. Information is made accessible through multiple formats, including captioned video, ensuring that pupils with disabilities can access routine safety information. Hence the school implements reasonable adjustments, including to teaching methods, to enable any pupils with a disability to take a full part in school life as far as is possible. In all ways, the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

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

22. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. Leaders implement an ambitious and coherent curriculum for children in the early years that is beyond statutory expectations. Adults astutely respond to children's interests, developmental stages and emerging needs. The indoor and outdoor environments are well-resourced so that they actively promote exploration, creativity, independence and sustained learning.
24. Adults use skilful questioning, precise modelling and timely intervention to extend language, thinking, collaboration and resilience. They strategically deepen children's understanding and knowledge of the world by guiding them towards appropriate activities. Children are encouraged to revisit, practise and extend skills across all areas of learning through play and enquiry.
25. In the early years, children demonstrate engagement, concentration and curiosity. They sustain imaginative play, solve problems, make decisions and apply early literacy, mathematical and communication skills confidently. They respond enthusiastically to challenge. As a result, children make good progress from their starting points and leave Reception well-prepared for Year 1. This effective start contributes positively to the attainment and progress of pupils in Years 1 and 2.
26. Prep school pupils follow a curriculum that prepares them effectively for senior school. They study a wide range of subjects, including Latin and modern foreign languages. Subject leaders integrate the opportunities of the school's outdoor environment to further pupils' knowledge and skills in areas such as science, geography and art. The curriculum supports the school's successful commitment to enhancing pupils' creative skills. For example, pupils develop their own projects in physics and design.
27. Leaders provide a broad senior school curriculum. Pupils learn the full set of sciences, humanities, creative subjects and up to two languages alongside a planned PSHE programme. Sixth form pupils choose between the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma programme, A levels or BTEC Nationals in, for example, agriculture or music technology. The curriculum therefore enables pupils to prepare for a wide range of university courses and careers. Leaders' emphasis on recognising opportunities to develop creativity results in the large number of pupils who study science, technology and mathematics alongside subjects such as fine art, art and design, photography and three-dimensional design.
28. Leaders organise the teaching week to enable pupils to participate in a wide choice of co-curricular activities. Academic societies provide further stimulation outside the taught curriculum. Subject clinics are regularly provided at weekends or in the evenings to support pupils' progress. The school provides an extensive choice of sport, music, drama and outdoor activity. Many senior school pupils are members of the Combined Cadet Force and/or take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Boarding leaders arrange social events between houses. Pupils play sport for fun, and, for example, music, art and craft areas are available for pupils who might not be following examination courses. As a result, pupils develop a broad range of skills and new interests. Leaders ensure that there are activities for boarders in their areas of interest, but that they have enough independence to make choices about the use of their free time.
29. In the prep and senior school, teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and plan lessons that build effectively on pupils' prior learning, ensuring that all pupils are intellectually motivated. Lesson

activities are well chosen and varied, enabling pupils to engage with new concepts and deepen their understanding.

30. Teachers manage lessons effectively and use a range of well-selected resources. Pupils demonstrate responsible attitudes towards their work. Teachers set clear expectations for behaviour, resulting in calm, purposeful lessons where pupils remain focused on their work.
31. Pupils' understanding is tested and developed through effective teacher questioning in the classroom, with an emphasis on challenging pupils to explain the thinking behind their responses. Focused questioning enables pupils of varying prior attainment to contribute meaningfully. Teachers vary vocabulary and sentence structure for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Consequently, they make good progress in their acquisition of English and subject understanding.
32. Prep and senior pupils who have SEND are effectively identified by specialist staff. They produce plans for individual pupils and guidance sheets for teachers. Teachers make unobtrusive and subtle adjustments to their approaches and complexity of language. For example, they give pupils additional time to process information. SEND leaders regularly review with pupils the effectiveness of the strategies adopted by their teachers and suggest modifications. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress in lessons.
33. Leaders track pupils' progress through a structured system of data based on pupils' attainment in formal tests in both the prep and senior school. Teachers use results to provide additional help, to revisit topics, or to plan more challenging lessons. Leaders use data to analyse progress over longer periods. Pupils consistently make good progress from their starting points in GCSE and sixth-form courses.
34. Lessons in the creative arts are well resourced and thoughtfully planned to align with pupils' interests and skills. Pupils throughout the school produce a quality of art that is typically beyond the norm for their age. They invariably attain the highest possible grades at GCSE and A level in creative subjects and regularly achieve success in national competitions.

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

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

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

36. Leaders in the early years plan opportunities for children to develop their self-confidence in role-play activities and experiences in the outdoor area. Prep school pupils are encouraged to speak and perform in public. The school's co-curricular programme is used to widen pupils' experience, for example through activities in the Combined Cadet Force or The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. As a result, pupils grow in self-confidence and self-esteem.
37. Younger pupils are successfully encouraged to reflect on nature in outdoor lessons. Leaders use time in chapel to stimulate pupils' spiritual awareness in the context of the Christian and other faiths. The school organises an annual 'Soul Space' event during which pupils are guided to develop the skills of contemplation.
38. Leaders use play and outdoor activities to encourage children in the early years to make decisions in the choice of equipment, or with whom to play. Pupils exemplify the school mantra of 'doing the right thing even when difficult'. The Christian Union and debating societies give pupils further opportunities to develop and hear different views on current moral issues.
39. Boarding houses are cohesive communities because of the shared understanding of expected behaviours in daily life. Boarders behave with integrity and empathy towards each other. They have high levels of respect for those from different national, ethnic or religious backgrounds.
40. Governors provide a wide range of resources to support pupils' physical development and skills. Younger children are encouraged and guided to try new apparatus. As a result, they develop their co-ordination and balance quickly. Prep and senior school pupils play sport regularly, often to a high level. The curriculum is well planned and successfully enables them to develop their individual competence and play team sports. Boarding houses organise their own running events to nearby seaside resorts. Many pupils develop skills outside mainstream sports, in shooting, kayaking and dance. As a result, pupils are physically fit and enjoy exercise.
41. Leaders provide a curriculum in relationships and sex education (RSE) that is appropriate for pupils' ages. The programme allows time for discussion, so that pupils are able to successfully share their concerns. As a result, pupils develop an informed understanding of relevant issues.
42. The PSHE curriculum includes guidance about how to eat healthily. Leaders provide a balanced diet for boarders, and opportunities to snack between main meals. Pupils are aware of the dangers to health of, for example, smoking, vaping and using illegal drugs. Specialist nurses provide advice to pupils about their sexual health.
43. Pupils take responsibility for their own actions. The behaviour policies in the prep and senior schools set clear expectations. Leaders successfully encourage pupils to reflect on their actions. As a result, published sanctions are rarely needed.
44. Leaders successfully implement a policy for the use of mobile telephones. The procedures are consistently applied, and their rationale is understood by pupils. The arrangements provide enough flexibility for boarders to contact parents and greater access to mobile telephones for pupils in the sixth form.

45. Pupils are taught, and staff are trained, to identify, address and report any possible bullying behaviours. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to discuss issues with older pupils or staff. As a result, incidents of bullying are rare.
46. An appropriate number and range of adults are trained to give first aid. Adults teaching in the early years have qualifications specific to the age of the children. Nursing staff liaise effectively with boarding staff about the administration of medicines. Leaders ensure that staff running trips or off-site activities have detailed information about the medical needs of individual pupils.
47. The buildings and grounds on each of the three school sites are well maintained. Detailed records of health and safety checks are kept. Leaders regularly review the levels of risk to pupils in all activities, and as a result they actively promote pupils' physical safety. Protocols relating to fire safety and security are implemented effectively. Fire evacuation procedures are regularly practised, including at times when boarders are in their houses.
48. Boarding accommodation is well equipped and furnished. Food is of a good quality and plentiful. Boarders are well looked after, including when they are unwell. They have a range of adults to whom they can talk about concerns. Tutors provide a long-term oversight of pupils' academic and personal development as they move through the senior school. Boarders receive a thorough induction programme, including in the procedure to follow in case of fire.
49. Children in the early years and older pupils are effectively supervised. Leaders make regular checks on boarders' whereabouts. Boarding staff have clear procedures to follow if a boarder was missing.
50. Prefects in the prep and senior school have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They are effectively trained and monitored and represent effectively the views of other pupils to school leaders.
51. The school's admission and attendance policies are implemented effectively. The policies reflect the statutory guidance for both day and boarding pupils. The school's attendance champion liaises with the relevant authorities when necessary.

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

52. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

53. Leaders ensure that human and social education is threaded through the taught and co-curriculum. Children in the early years share tasks, play and sing together, and quickly develop socially. Pupils throughout the school are encouraged to make their own choices, for example of sport or co-curricular activity. The curriculum educates pupils about countries or political systems that do not allow individual liberty or are intolerant of different faiths. Younger pupils learn about what is meant by prejudice. Chapel services recognise that others have strong beliefs that differ from Christian orthodoxy.
54. Children in pre-prep and prep-aged pupils are introduced to the food, dress and traditions of other cultures, for example during Diwali or Eid. Senior pupils are encouraged to make links between pupils' culture and religion from a historical and contemporary viewpoint. Boarding houses are communities in which diversity of belief and background is highly respected. Boarders are consistently alert to the needs of others. Boarding leaders cement these values with events in music, sport and 'house evenings'.
55. Leaders implement a well-planned programme that develops pupils' financial literacy. Children in the early years start to recognise terms such as 'buy and sell' through role-play scenarios in shops and cafés. They are encouraged to save house points. Teachers in the prep school use the calculation of change in pounds and pence to practise subtraction and the use of decimals. Pupils study the concept of risk and probability as they explore the National Lottery and the history of the Titanic. They learn about global trade in geography and make decisions about pricing in the annual prep school fête. As a result, by the time they leave the prep school, pupils have a foundation of economic understanding.
56. The senior school curriculum further develops pupils' economic knowledge. Pupils learn about budgeting and borrowing, gambling and debt. Visiting speakers present sessions on, for example, agricultural economics and supply chains, income tax and pensions. Creative design courses consider product cost in the context of commercial viability. Sixth-form pupils are comprehensively prepared to make financial decisions in post-school education. The taught curriculum is enhanced by opportunities to visit local businesses and organise fundraising events.
57. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 reflect on their strengths and areas for development as they approach the move to senior school. Leaders plan activities that enable pupils to identify their skills and develop their leadership and teamwork. Pupils start to learn how individuals contribute to an effective organisation. Pupils in the senior school have access to careers software. They undertake an annual 'aspiration review', relating it to their curriculum and co-curricular choices. Visiting speakers give talks about careers, for example in the armed services and commerce. However, there are few opportunities for pupils of this age to undertake direct work experience, which would allow them a more informed choice about careers.
58. Pupils in the sixth form receive individual guidance on careers and post-school opportunities. Qualified careers advisors promote degree apprenticeships alongside university degrees. A large bank of former pupils offer bespoke advice. As a result, pupils are well prepared to make informed decisions and go on to study a broad range of subjects after leaving school. A large proportion follow

courses in creative areas such as fine art, brand marketing and engineering design. A number gain places at specialist music, art and drama colleges.

59. Leaders have established clear criteria for the selection of pupils to positions of responsibility. Pupils vote for those they consider to be suitable school or house prefects. Leaders use these opportunities to demonstrate how democracy works. Discussions in, for example, history, geography and school debates are used to further explore democracy in the UK and other countries. The PSHE curriculum effectively teaches pupils about the differences between criminal and civil law. Pupils can explain, for example, the difference between 'reasonable doubt' and 'balance of probabilities'. Pupils learn about the contributions of the public, private and charitable sectors to British life. They are well informed about the role that they might play in British society.
60. Children and pupils actively support each other in school, as well as supporting the local community. Voluntary service is a strand of the 'Gresham's challenge' followed by prep school pupils. For example, they invite local residents to exhibitions of their art, concerts and plays. They undertake litter picking on Norfolk beaches and perform music in residential homes.
61. A large majority of senior school pupils contribute widely to the community. They support local schools, visit care homes and work with charities in the town. The school's creative art departments are significant participants in a number of Norfolk arts projects for young people.

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

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

Safeguarding

63. Leaders have created a secure safeguarding culture. Safeguarding procedures are implemented effectively so that the wellbeing of both boarders and day pupils, including children in the early years, is promoted. Governors are well trained, so that they maintain an informed oversight of the implementation of safeguarding arrangements effectively. They review records, hold discussions with staff and pupils, and visit boarding houses. This ensures that the required procedures and protocols are followed.
64. Safeguarding leaders engage regularly with local safeguarding partners, including children's services and, when necessary, the police. Leaders and staff act on the advice given. They understand their role in reporting any person about whom they have concerns to relevant regulatory bodies as required. The low-level concerns procedures work effectively. Staff are aware of the increased risks associated with both a boarding community and very young children.
65. Staff receive frequent and detailed safeguarding training in line with local requirements and statutory guidance. This includes guidance in preventing the risk of radicalisation, countering extremism and supporting pupils to keep safe online. Leaders keep an accurate register of training provided and who has attended. Training is bespoke to the role of members of staff and volunteers in identifying potential risks to pupils.
66. Adults involved with children in the early years follow the statutory protocols about intimate care, the storage of medicines, the use of mobile telephones and observation of children eating.
67. The safeguarding policy includes suitable definitions of abuse and is in line with latest statutory guidance. School leaders, boarding and teaching staff communicate effectively if they notice changes in the behaviour or demeanour of a pupil. Staff share concerns with senior leaders to ensure that pupils are appropriately supported. Issues that reach the thresholds for formal reporting are immediately addressed.
68. Medical staff, the chaplaincy team and other designated professionals work closely with safeguarding leaders so that support for individual pupils promotes their emotional and physical wellbeing.
69. Safeguarding records are up to date, thorough and detailed. They provide information about how concerns are followed up and contain notes of any action taken and the reasons for decisions reached. They include formal risk assessments for pupils when needed. The action taken is frequently scrutinised and evaluated.
70. Leaders implement effective procedures to prevent access to inappropriate material on the internet. Website use and other online activity by staff and pupils are closely monitored. Governors regularly review and test the effectiveness of the arrangements.
71. Pupils feel safe in school and in boarding time, including online. Protocols to keep boarders secure are reviewed regularly.
72. Pupils are confident to speak with safeguarding leaders, housemasters and housemistresses, tutors and nurses. Leaders provide a variety of ways in which pupils can share concerns confidentially. Pre-prep and prep school pupils reflect with their teachers at the end of each day. Nurses provide

weekly drop-in sessions for senior pupils to confidentially share their concerns. Boarders are aware of the identity and contact details of people independent of the school with whom they can speak if they are worried.

73. Appropriate recruitment checks are undertaken on governors, staff and other adults, according to their role. Information is recorded accurately in the school's single central record of appointments. House staff ensure that they test the suitability of guardians and explore boarders' experiences when they return from weekend leave.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Gresham's School
Department for Education number	926/6003
Registered charity number	1105500
Address	Gresham's School Cromer Road Holt Norfolk NR25 6EA
Phone number	01263 714500
Email address	reception@greshams.com
Website	www.greshams.com
Proprietor	Gresham's School
Chair	Mr Paul Marriage
Headteacher	Mr Douglas Robb
Age range	2 to 18
Number of pupils	887
Number of boarding pupils	282
Date of previous inspection	18 to 20 April 2023

Information about the school

75. Gresham's is an independent, co-educational day and boarding school located in the town of Holt in north Norfolk. It comprises a pre-prep, preparatory and senior school located close to each other. It belongs to a charitable foundation and is governed by the charity's trustees.
76. Boarders are accommodated in eight boarding houses, one of which is designated for prep school pupils. Day pupils are members of either a boarding house or a single day house.
77. The pre-prep school includes an early years setting for children from the age of two. It includes Nursery provision and two classes in Reception.
78. The school has identified 224 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are 13 pupils in the school who have an education, health and care plan.
79. The school has identified English as an additional language for 119 pupils.
80. The school states its aims are to provide a caring, challenging and enlightened education which celebrates British values in a Christian setting.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 April 2026

81. A team of eleven inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

82. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods, assemblies and chapel services
- 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.

83. 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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For more information, please visit isi.net