

School inspection report

24 to 26 February 2026

The Croft Preparatory School

Loxley Road

Stratford-Upon-Avon

CV37 7RL

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 school's proprietorial board and governing committee support leaders effectively. Together with other leaders, they promote the school's aims and ambition routinely across all aspects of their work. The board and governors have the expertise and experience to provide high-quality support and challenge leaders to continue to improve. Pupils' wellbeing is a priority. Consequently, potential risks to their health and safety are managed competently.
2. Pupils experience a diverse, ambitious curriculum that underpins their high levels of interest and motivation to learn. Effective teaching overall supports them to develop their knowledge and skills progressively. Typically, teachers plan thoughtfully to meet pupils' different needs.
3. The use of assessment information to inform teachers' planning is effective overall but inconsistent across different subjects. This sometimes limits pupils' scope to build on previously acquired knowledge, skills and understanding.
4. In the early years, teaching and learning build effectively on children's individual needs and interests. As a result, they achieve well. Children secure well-developed communication skills. These are underpinned by the consistently positive encouragement they receive from staff to express their thoughts and opinions. Overall, children are well prepared to move on to Year 1.
5. Leaders and staff work effectively to promote pupils' physical and mental health alongside their emotional wellbeing. Pupils' positive self-esteem is supported by the successful reinforcement of the school's core values in lessons, assemblies and wider school life.
6. The school fosters a culture of respect for diverse cultures and backgrounds. Pupils deepen their awareness of intolerance and the consequences of discriminatory actions through discussions in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons and across other subject areas.
7. Appropriately trained staff implement the school's health, safety and fire arrangements rigorously. The premises include suitable facilities for pupils, including for medical care when required. Leaders have due regard to the importance of promoting pupils' attendance. They maintain an appropriate admission register.
8. The school prepares pupils well for the next stage of their lives. Leaders and staff manage pupils' transition between year groups and phases effectively. They provide appropriate support for pupils in Year 6 as they prepare to move to senior school. Pupils build a clear understanding of the value of prudent financial planning as part of their wider development.
9. Safeguarding arrangements are effective due to the expertise of leaders with designated safeguarding responsibility. Governors and directors provide rigorous oversight. The safeguarding team accesses timely advice and support from external agencies when required. Pupils have appropriate mechanisms for reporting concerns. Leaders respond effectively when concerns are raised.

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 the intended assessment practices, in subjects other than English and mathematics, are securely embedded and applied routinely to inform curriculum planning and targeted interventions, so that pupils achieve consistently well across all aspects of their learning.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders' regular evaluation of the school's successes and areas for development contributes effectively to well-considered forward planning and pupils' successful outcomes. They promote the school's aims routinely across daily school life. Leaders seek pupils', staff and parents' views regularly. They take these into account in planning ongoing improvements. Pupils share their ideas and views in a variety of ways, including through the school council and the food council. Their ideas result in positive improvements to school experiences for all pupils. For example, a suggestion by pupils in Year 4 that coats with hoods should be introduced was adopted across the whole school following debate in the school council and discussion with senior leaders.
11. Governors and directors provide support and challenge to leaders through regular board and committee meetings. They apply a rigorous approach so that the Standards are met consistently. During regular visits to the school, they meet with pupils and staff to evaluate how effectively policies and procedures are implemented. Governors ensure that leaders have the expertise to fulfil their responsibilities through regular appraisals of performance. The school's approach to coaching staff contributes positively towards their professional development and pupils' achievement. Leaders liaise effectively with external agencies and seek specialist advice when needed to strengthen and support pupils' welfare.
12. The early years' offer is effective and well led. Leaders hold regular meetings with staff to evaluate their practice in supporting children and meeting their needs. Well-established oversight of the early years ensures that routines run smoothly so that children settle quickly and engagement in learning is sustained. This supports children's wellbeing effectively, as well as their consistently positive learning experiences over time.
13. Leaders are rigorous in implementing the school's risk management policy. Staff are well trained to identify and mitigate risks to pupils' welfare. The educational visits co-ordinator ensures suitable actions are considered by staff when organising external visits. Risk assessments carefully consider pupils' welfare and needs. Associated risks are addressed appropriately.
14. Parents access the required information, such as policies and previous inspection reports, through the school's website. Leaders ensure that parents receive timely and informative communication from the school. These include regular reports on pupils' progress and areas for improvement. The school provides appropriate information to the local authority relating to the use of funding for any pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Parents are appreciative of the support and advice they receive, including through the online communication tool used in the early years.
15. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders successfully promote equality of opportunity. They regularly seek to identify ways in which the site and curriculum can be made more accessible to pupils, including through a suitable accessibility plan.
16. An appropriate complaints policy is readily available to parents via the school's website. Leaders implement the policy effectively. Leaders take account of parents' concerns through questionnaires and make themselves available at the school gate at the beginning and end of the school day.

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

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Pupils experience a coherent and diverse curriculum that is built around the school's 'Backpack for Life'. This is designed to give pupils the life skills that will help them in their future lives. Pupils' development of linguistic, mathematical, scientific and technological knowledge, skills and understanding is well supported by detailed curriculum planning. This facilitates pupils' methodical progress across the school's five faculties, including languages, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), humanities, creative arts and emotional and physical development.
19. Pupils are well supported to develop their reading skills. These skills are underpinned by the effective grounding in phonics established in the early years, as well as exposure to a variety of appropriate literature. Pupils write effectively. They evaluate and edit their written work carefully. They build confident communication skills as a result of the many opportunities they have to work collaboratively and present ideas to different audiences.
20. Pupils respond eagerly to increasingly complex tasks and personalised learning targets that their teachers set them. They become ambitious, self-motivated learners due to the resilience they develop in response to teachers' skilful questioning. This deepens pupils' thinking so they achieve well.
21. Leaders closely monitor pupils' progress in English and mathematics through the regular analysis of information from tests and regular checks on their knowledge, skills and understanding. They use this information to identify gaps in pupils' learning, providing suitable improvement targets when required. However, assessment information is not used as effectively in some subjects as it is in English and mathematics. When this happens, pupils' capacity to build on their existing knowledge, skills and understanding is more limited. Pupils are well supported to gain places at senior schools, including those with selective entry requirements.
22. Pupils synthesise information confidently from several sources when undertaking independent study, for example in humanities subjects such as geography and history, as well as in PSHE. Information technology is used effectively to enable pupils to acquire a range of new skills and apply them across different subjects. Pupils experience a rich and varied visual and performing arts curriculum, which is designed effectively to enable them to make good progress, as seen in the variety and quality of artwork exhibited around the school and the wide range of performance opportunities open to pupils.
23. Pupils' interest in learning is enhanced through the school's wider curriculum. They participate and build skills enthusiastically, for example through an extensive programme of clubs, including a range of sports and arts activities. The varied programme of educational visits, residential field trips and visitors to the school extends classroom learning. This further enhances pupils' knowledge, skills and interests.
24. Teachers know their pupils well. As a result, they plan lessons appropriately to meet pupils' specific needs. Consequently, pupils respond positively to the variety of effective teaching methods and suitable resources used. Teachers apply their subject knowledge effectively, which captures pupils' interest, so they typically achieve well. Pupils' motivation to learn is aided by the productive, collaborative approaches they experience with their teachers and peers. They are adept at thinking for themselves and expressing their thoughts with clarity.

25. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs identified appropriately at an early stage. Leaders of provision for pupils who have SEND co-ordinate checks on learning to identify and implement well-considered, individualised adaptations to teaching. This means that pupils access the curriculum successfully. Leaders use external expertise in this process to offer further specialist support to pupils when needed.
26. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) make rapid progress due to the quality of the teaching they receive. This includes prompt, targeted support to build their spoken and written English language skills.
27. Children in the early years access a well-sequenced curriculum. Leaders prioritise children's language and communication skills development. Staff are adept at using a range of planned activities that incorporate children's interests to develop their confidence in articulating their views and thoughts. In the early years, staff use information from assessment to adapt teaching, support consolidation and ensure that children are well prepared for transition into Year 1. Children achieve well as they build key skills, such as early reading and numeracy, due to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning they experience.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. Leaders and staff promote the school's core values effectively. Pupils understand and endeavour to model these values. Children in the early years demonstrate respectful behaviour and kindness towards one another due to the positive example set by staff. Pupils throughout the school are typically understanding and respectful towards other cultures and others' wide-ranging backgrounds.
30. Pupils show high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. This results from the detailed understanding and effective care that staff provide to meet individual needs. Pupils respond positively to the regular celebration of their achievements in assemblies and newsletters.
31. Staff deliver a comprehensive PSHE programme. Teachers and leaders regularly assess the impact of the programme to inform ongoing improvements. Appropriate adjustments to lessons are made based on pupils' feedback. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 regularly take the lead in identifying topics to include, based on relevance to their needs and interests. For example, in Year 5, pupils discussed which themes to explore when considering the plight of refugees.
32. The relationships and sex education (RSE) programme reflects current statutory guidance. It is designed and implemented appropriately to align with pupils' needs. Teachers who teach the RSE curriculum receive appropriate training to deliver its content effectively. The curriculum supports pupils to gain a well-developed understanding of the factors that contribute towards healthy relationships. Older pupils receive age-appropriate guidance in RSE lessons and assemblies, such as when learning about consent and how to manage change, loss, anxiety and pressure.
33. The school's carefully devised behaviour and bullying policies are consistently and effectively implemented. Pupils typically make appropriate choices in the way they behave as a result of the effective promotion of the school's values. This is underpinned by the consistent implementation of the behaviour charter and positive role modelling provided by staff and older pupils. Pupils have a clear understanding of what bullying means. They know it is not acceptable and are confident that, should it occur, it would be dealt with effectively by staff.
34. Leaders and staff support pupils' wellbeing effectively. Children in the early years demonstrate self-regulation, co-operation and respect for others. These skills are supported by the explicit teaching of emotional regulation strategies, such as movement breaks. Pupils have access to staff with expertise in mental health. This enables them to learn a range of techniques to enhance their emotional wellbeing, for example through emotional coaching, yoga and mindfulness sessions.
35. The school promotes pupils' spiritual understanding effectively. The religious education programme teaches pupils about different world faiths. Pupils deepen their understanding of a variety of beliefs through visits to different places of worship and by attending talks from representatives of different faiths. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 consider different moral choices when deciding which direction to take down 'Conscience Alley' in drama lessons.
36. Staff are effective in supporting pupils' physical health. Pupils receive appropriate guidance about the benefits of healthy eating and regular exercise in PSHE, physical education (PE) and science lessons. Children in the early years develop a clear understanding of how to keep their bodies

healthy. They achieve well-developed fine and gross motor skills due to the range of opportunities they have to learn outdoors, swim and participate in PE sessions.

37. The school premises are suitably maintained. Health and safety, site security and fire safety arrangements are effective. Leaders ensure that required checks and maintenance are undertaken regularly, including where appropriate by external experts. Staff receive thorough training in health and safety and fire safety. Fire evacuation drills are undertaken regularly and evaluated rigorously to identify areas for improvement. Pupils, including children in the early years, are appropriately supervised when on and off site. Arrangements for first aid and medical care for pupils are effective due to the rigorous implementation of the school policy by well-qualified staff.
38. The school maintains admission and attendance registers in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance rates effectively and act appropriately to address absenteeism. Leaders notify the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at a non-standard time.

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

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

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

40. Leaders are effective in promoting the school's core values and the skills underpinning the 'Backpack for Life' curriculum. As a result, pupils develop attributes relevant to the next stage of their lives. They gain a clear understanding of the values that underpin British society through regular discussions with teachers in lessons and assemblies. Pupils develop a well-established understanding of parliamentary democracy. They experience democratic processes firsthand when voting to elect pupils to positions of responsibility and when debating issues in pupils' councils. Pupils learn to respect others' viewpoints when debating themes such as whether a wind farm should be built locally. Staff ensure that any discussions that include political themes are conducted impartially.
41. Pupils gain an appreciation of and respect for a range of different cultures, faiths and beliefs. For example, pupils in Year 2 learn about Judaism from guest speakers. Pupils in Year 3 gain an appreciation of African music and culture. In Year 4, pupils discuss British laws aimed at countering discrimination and Year 6 pupils consider the plight of refugees. As a result, pupils value the importance of respect and interact happily together.
42. Pupils are well informed about the role of the rule of law and the consequences of right and wrong choices. All pupils from Reception to Year 5 contribute towards the formulation of class behaviour charters. They have a clear understanding of how a system of rules and moral values underpin a safe and respectful society.
43. Pupils learn about different institutions and services that contribute to British communities. In the early years, children learn about the importance of oral hygiene during a visit by a dentist. Pupils in Year 1 attend demonstrations by the fire service and in Year 2 pupils learn about different people who serve their school community. PSHE lessons enable pupils to consider different career pathways that they might follow in their future lives. Young entrepreneurs deliver informative talks to pupils in Year 6.
44. The taught curriculum ensures that pupils learn how to manage finances effectively. In the early years, for example, children undertake shopping trips in their role-play areas using play money. In Year 5, pupils learn about different types of tax, such as VAT. Year 6 pupils apply financial skills when creating their own business plans.
45. Pupils who are new to the school are assigned a 'buddy' to help them settle in quickly. A smooth transition between year groups is achieved through annual 'moving up' days. Pupils in Year 2 complete a 'Moving On' topic. They interview pupils in Year 3 to help support their move to new classes. Older pupils are well prepared for transition to senior school. This is due to the opportunities available to visit their senior schools and to participate in reflection discussions after their visits.
46. Pupils respond positively to the wide range of opportunities available to them to take on positions of responsibility. They take their leadership roles, such as core value ambassadors, seriously. They contribute effectively to the welfare of others in the school community. This includes pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 serving lunch to their peers. Pupils gain an appreciation of the importance of contributing to the wider community. Children in Reception sing songs to and play board games with residents in

a residential care home. Pupils in Year 3 to Year 6 organise a charity day in which they raise funds by selling a range of products they have made.

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

47. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

48. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are robust and effective. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Leaders regularly update the safeguarding policy to reflect changes to statutory requirements. Safeguarding leaders liaise regularly with all staff to monitor pupils' wellbeing. This includes working with pastoral leaders, medical staff, the leader of provision for pupils who have SEND and mental health experts.
49. Governors and directors maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements. They meet regularly with safeguarding leaders and complete on-site visits to assess the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures at first hand.
50. Staff are well trained to identify potential safeguarding concerns, including those associated with extremism and radicalisation. Consequently, they understand their responsibility to be vigilant and to report all concerns, including those that are seemingly low level. They record and report safeguarding concerns in a timely and appropriate way.
51. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities liaise effectively and promptly with relevant external agencies. They refer safeguarding concerns to them when appropriate. Leaders maintain suitable and securely stored safeguarding records in accordance with the requirements of current statutory guidance.
52. Pupils are supported through a range of different methods for reporting concerns. They are typically confident in approaching trusted adults to share concerns, or they can place their concern in a 'worry bot' in the ICT room. Pupils in Reception to Year 6 undertake an annual six-week course so they understand how to access support if they have a concern. Staff take seriously any concerns that pupils raise and respond to them promptly and sensitively. The school teaches pupils how to keep safe, including when online. An appropriate internet monitoring and filtering system is in place and regularly tested. Leaders provide parents with helpful guidance about how they can keep their children safe online.
53. The school carries out all the required safer recruitment checks before staff commence employment. Governors and leaders provide suitable oversight of the single central record of appointments and pre-appointment checks to ensure that it is maintained accurately. All leaders involved in staff recruitment receive appropriate training in safer recruitment practice.
54. Leaders in the early years complete suitable safer recruitment training. They are involved in the recruitment of all staff who join the early years foundation stage (EYFS). Leaders promote a rigorous culture in which early years staff maintain high levels of vigilance and care for children. They are rigorous in recording and following up concerns.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	The Croft Preparatory School
Department for Education number	937/6016
Address	The Croft Preparatory School Loxley Road Stratford-Upon-Avon Warwickshire CV37 7RL
Phone number	01789 293795
Email address	office@croftschool.co.uk
Website	www.croftschool.co.uk
Proprietor	The Croft School Limited
Chair	Mrs Lyndall Bagnall née Thornton
Headteacher	Mr Marcus Cook
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	324
Date of previous inspection	14 September 2023

Information about the school

56. The Croft is an independent co-educational day preparatory school. The school is owned by the Thornton family and is a limited company with three of the family forming the board of directors. A governing committee has devolved responsibility for many functions. The school comprises two sections: the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children aged 3 to 5; and Years 1 to 6 for pupils aged 5 to 11 years.
57. There are 61 children in the early years, comprising 33 children in three Nursery classes and 28 in two Reception classes.
58. The school has identified 45 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
59. A very small number of pupils in the school speak English as an additional language.
60. The school states that its aims are to provide each child with academic challenge and the opportunity to succeed, and to enable them to develop a sense of self-worth, while nurturing a lifelong love of learning in a happy and secure environment.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

24 to 26 February 2026

61. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

62. 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 a director and the chair of the governing committee
- 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.

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

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

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

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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