

School inspection report

17 to 19 June 2025

Town Close School

14 Ipswich Road

Norwich

Norfolk

NR2 2LR

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders and governors embed the school's values and promote a culture of high standards, openness and trust. Leadership is collaborative and well distributed. Leaders and governors have a clear vision for the school's continuous improvement. Staff improve their practice through appropriate training and guidance from senior leaders. Leaders maintain rigorous oversight of safeguarding, risk management and compliance, ensuring that statutory responsibilities are fully met.
2. Leaders have designed a broad and balanced curriculum which enables pupils to make good progress across different subjects. Pupils achieve positive outcomes, particularly at Common Entrance (CE). In the early years, children learn in a language-rich environment. This develops children's communication, confidence and independence. Teaching across the school is engaging and ambitious. Assessment is used effectively to monitor pupils' progress and guide support. Subject specific teaching in the pre-prep is not always as well-developed as it could be. As a result, pupils in the pre-prep do not always build their subject-specific knowledge and understanding in order to be effectively prepared for learning in the prep department.
3. Pupils show a genuine love of learning. They are curious, reflective and eager to contribute. Lessons promote independent thinking. Teachers create inclusive classrooms where pupils are safe to express themselves, take intellectual risks and are guided by thorough feedback. Pupils benefit from a wide-ranging co-curricular programme and have opportunities to experience leadership and service.
4. Leaders prioritise pupils' personal development. A significant strength of the school is the deeply embedded culture of care and respect. Leaders weave the school's values into every aspect of school life. Pupils respond to this deliberate guidance and across all age groups demonstrate empathy, integrity and kindness in their relationships with others. Staff apply behaviour expectations consistently and pupils respond with maturity and personal responsibility. Leaders are quick to intervene when concerns arise and provide tailored support. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum is reviewed regularly with input from pupils. It is well delivered. Physical education (PE) is inclusive and ambitious. Many pupils represent the school in sport at local and county level. Pupils benefit from on-site access to medical professionals. Early years provision supports children's emotional development and behaviour effectively.
5. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to hold leadership positions and various roles of responsibility. They have regular dialogue with leaders and propose initiatives such as a packaging-free tuck shop. Pupils understand democratic values. They take pride in contributing to the community through charity work and service. They articulate the principles of equality and fairness. They show respect for the ways that people can be different. The curriculum supports pupils' understanding of civic structures, public institutions and financial literacy. Careers education prepares them well for life beyond school.
6. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and well led. Staff receive regular training and understand their responsibilities clearly. Governors maintain effective oversight. Leaders act swiftly when concerns are raised. They collaborate effectively with external agencies. Pupils know how to stay safe online and how to seek help.

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 teachers in pre-prep teach their subjects effectively so that younger pupils learn as successfully across different subjects as pupils in the prep department.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Leaders and governors share a commitment to the school's aims and strategic development. They embed the school's values, expressed through 'The Town Close Way', across all aspects of school life. This ethos, centred on pupils' academic ambition, personal growth, mutual respect and wellbeing, guides daily interactions. It shapes policies and strategic decisions.
8. Governors bring a wide range of relevant expertise to their roles. Governors work closely and effectively with senior leaders to oversee all aspects of school performance. The governing body holds leaders to account through structured meetings, performance reviews and planning sessions to ensure strategic outcomes are met. Governors divide responsibilities across committees that align closely with the school's strategic priorities.
9. Leaders receive mentoring, access professional development and engage in external training. This includes national leadership qualifications. This helps leaders to refine their skills, stay informed and contribute to school improvement through accurate self-evaluation, development planning and progress monitoring. Leaders' decisions focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for pupils.
10. Leaders and governors demonstrate an awareness of risk. They regularly review risk assessments to ensure the safety of pupils, staff and visitors. These cover aspects such as safeguarding, premises safety and co-curricular activities. Leaders and governors take timely and effective action to reduce risks, supported by staff training and routine monitoring.
11. Leaders place pupils' wellbeing at the centre of all aspects of school life. They promote it through the curriculum, pastoral systems and co-curricular opportunities. They support pupils to develop leadership skills through roles such as school council representatives and wellbeing ambassadors. Leaders listen to the school community through surveys, open forums and parent engagement events. This sustains a culture of openness, collaboration and trust.
12. Leaders' policies and systems ensure full compliance with statutory responsibilities, including those relating to safeguarding, health and safety and equality. Governors receive appropriate training and meet regularly with the safeguarding and health and safety leads to maintain effective oversight. Internal and external audits support the school's ongoing improvement. Leaders engage proactively with external agencies, including local authorities, to promote the wellbeing of both pupils and staff.
13. Leaders promote inclusivity and equality in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. They train staff in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Pupils access a curriculum that reflects a broad range of perspectives. The school's accessibility plan sets out how leaders adapt facilities and learning to ensure full access for pupils who have additional needs. Leaders review curriculum content routinely to ensure it remains relevant and aligned to school values and national guidance.
14. Governors engage actively in staff recruitment, particularly at senior levels. Leaders provide new staff with comprehensive induction training in safeguarding, health and safety and equality. Staff are confident to raise any questions or concerns through regular briefings, meetings and open communication.
15. Governors and leaders monitor pupils' academic and pastoral outcomes systematically. They evaluate pupils' progress data, conduct lesson visits and review findings to inform their decision-

making. The school's strategic plans are updated regularly in light of leaders' evaluations and feedback from pupils, parents and staff.

16. Leaders provide parents with a wealth of information through the school's website. They maintain good links with the local community. Leaders provide the local authority with the required information about the use of funds for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
17. Leaders manage concerns and complaints in line with the school's policy and systems. Governors review any complaints to monitor trends and ensure effective resolution.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. The curriculum is broad, balanced and designed to meet pupils' needs. Pupils make good academic progress and often attain above the national averages in English and mathematics. Pupils' academic success at CE enables them to move to their first-choice senior schools. In the early years, leaders enrich the curriculum with opportunities for children's language development, imaginative play and exploration. Children learn through role play, puppetry, singing and rhythm games. This supports their communication skills, social and physical development.
20. Subject leaders develop teaching plans that make meaningful cross-curricular links and bring real-world relevance to topics. Pupils in Years 3 to 8 deepen their knowledge in subjects such as French, science and art because the plans include content to teach pupils subject-specific vocabulary, knowledge and skills. In the pre-prep, some subjects are not taught as effectively. This means that in some subjects, younger pupils do not always acquire the relevant subject knowledge to enable them to make good progress and achieve as well as they could.
21. Teachers plan and resource lessons thoughtfully. They use a variety of methods, including songs, experiments and interactive activities to sustain pupils' engagement and deepen their understanding. For example, children in the early years explore early scientific thinking by observing tadpoles. Older pupils refine their writing and vocabulary through discussing and sharing their ideas with each other. Teachers set high expectations and typically teach lessons that are suitably challenging.
22. Teachers provide constructive, timely feedback that helps pupils reflect on their learning and identify their next steps. Pupils respond positively, showing confidence and curiosity during class discussions. Teachers create nurturing and purposeful classroom environments. Pupils are confident to ask questions, take risks and learn from their mistakes. This develops their independent thinking.
23. There is a culture of mutual respect between staff and pupils. Teachers create environments which allow ideas to be generated and shared. Pupils readily adopt the 'Town Close Way' values. They act with ambition, respect and support each other to enjoy learning.
24. Leaders use their assessment system across the school to check pupils' progress and achievement. Assessment results are scrutinised by teachers. They use this information to support pupils who need further help or to extend those pupils who are ready for additional challenge. Parents receive regular updates on their child's progress, ensuring they are well informed and actively involved in supporting their child's learning.
25. Teachers develop and use support plans to meet the specific needs of pupils who have SEND. Teachers set and review pupils' personal targets regularly. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) works closely with staff to ensure teaching approaches remain consistent and impactful. Pupils who have SEND make good progress.
26. Staff provide skilful support within the classroom for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Teachers provide key technical vocabulary ahead of the start of a topic to ensure pupils who speak EAL are familiar with the terminology and can better understand the concepts being taught.

27. Early years staff create an inclusive and language-rich learning environment that promotes children's curiosity and enthusiasm to learn. Children display increasing confidence, empathy and independence. Learning activities such as swimming and adventurous outdoor play support children's fine and gross motor development. Staff use open-ended questions to encourage children to articulate their thoughts and ideas. They model language to extend children's vocabulary and communication skills.
28. Staff deliver a wide-ranging co-curricular programme that supports pupils' personal and social development. Pupils enjoy these activities and many represent the school competitively, balancing fun with skill development.

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. Leaders have defined the school's values and refer to them as the 'Town Close Way'. These values are threaded into policies, assemblies, curriculum planning, and pastoral care. Leaders and staff continually model and refer to these values. Staff receive training and guidance to reinforce these values in their interactions with pupils. They consistently encourage pupils to support one another, creating a collaborative and uplifting environment. Pupils benefit from the school's strong sense of belonging and purpose, which enhances their confidence, motivation, and social awareness. Pupils consistently demonstrate high levels of compassion, empathy and emotional maturity towards each other. They engage thoughtfully with the views and experiences of those from different backgrounds. They show a developed understanding of the different needs of others. Pupils model inclusive behaviours which create a supportive and respectful school culture.
31. The school promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development with great care. Pupils reflect with sincerity and maturity on key themes such as kindness, forgiveness and personal responsibility. They demonstrate a well-developed moral compass. Pupils treat each other with integrity and show a principled understanding of fairness and respect. Pupils develop respect for diversity and personal identity through learning about different faiths and traditions such as Hinduism and Rangoli as an art form.
32. Leaders deliver a well-structured curriculum for PSHE education. This is reviewed regularly to reflect current issues and pupils' changing needs. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is delivered with care and clarity. Teachers address sensitive topics with confidence. This ensures pupils are informed and comfortable to engage in discussions.
33. Pupils of all abilities participate and achieve in physical activity through the school's engaging PE curriculum. Many pupils represent the school at local and county-level competitions. This reflects the quality and breadth of provision. Staff teach pupils how to live healthily and enjoy physical activity.
34. Behaviour throughout the school is calm, respectful and purposeful. Staff apply the school's behaviour policy consistently and fairly. Pupils understand the expectations. They willingly take responsibility for managing their actions which support the school's positive environment. Leaders monitor behaviour incidents through an online system. They review trends to provide timely and targeted support when required.
35. Leaders take a proactive approach to prevent bullying. They maintain detailed anti-bullying records which are reviewed. This enables leaders to detect emerging patterns and take necessary actions.
36. The school's health and safety procedures are comprehensive and meticulously overseen. Premises are clean, bright and provide a secure environment for everyone. Staff and pupils understand and follow emergency procedures confidently. There are regular fire drills and checks on evacuation routes and safety equipment.
37. Staff supervise pupils effectively throughout the school day. This includes during transitions and social times. They know pupils well and intervene supportively when needed. This contributes to an atmosphere that is positive, calm and respectful.

38. Leaders maintain accurate admissions and attendance registers. They follow statutory procedures diligently. They take swift action to follow up on absences. They notify the appropriate authorities when pupils join or leave the school outside standard transition points.
39. Pupils have access to a school doctor and a qualified counsellor, both of whom visit weekly. First aid arrangements are well coordinated. Leaders monitor accident records to identify trends and adjust provision accordingly. Qualified staff hold responsibilities for health-related matters. They respond promptly to pupils' needs.
40. In the early years, staff promote children's personal and physical development through a broad, play-led curriculum. Children engage in meaningful tasks that develop their independence and ability to manage their emotions. Activities such as building structures with construction toys, dance and tennis help develop children's resilience and coordination. Children take responsibility for simple routines such as handing out cups at snack time and tidying up after playtime. Early years staff receive regular training to improve their practice, including how to develop children's speech and language and social skills.
41. Leaders promote pupils' opportunities for leadership through a wide range of meaningful roles. Pupils contribute as house captains, school councillors, prefects and buddies. Older pupils support younger peers at lunchtime and in the library. Pupils value these responsibilities. They recognise their role in shaping school life and supporting others.

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

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

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

43. Pupils learn about British values through the well-planned curriculum and inclusive school culture. These align to the school's values. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of mutual respect, tolerance and the importance of individual liberty. British values are reinforced through assemblies, displays and opportunities for pupils to share their views. Pupils articulate the importance of kindness and respect. They know that being kind makes others feel better. Pupils express their views confidently and understand how their contributions shape school life and wider society.
44. Pupils' cultural understanding is nurtured through curriculum content, classroom discussions and enrichment activities such as trips to France and Belgium and visits to galleries and theatres. Pupils reflect on their heritage. They demonstrate empathy and curiosity about other cultures. This promotes inclusion and helps to develop a sense of global citizenship.
45. Teachers prepare pupils effectively for life in modern Britain. During PSHE lessons, pupils learn about civic structures, taxation and government. They value opportunities to elect others for leadership roles. They understand the significance of democratic processes. In the early years, children begin to develop social awareness through age-appropriate activities such as taking turns and sharing resources that encourage collaboration and independence.
46. Pupil voice is embedded in school life. Pupils shape the school's direction through student council discussions and meetings with the headteacher. Leaders listen to pupils and, where possible, integrate pupils' ideas into operational aspects of the school. For example, pupils recently proposed optional courses such as animation, bushcraft, food technology and architecture. As a result, leaders plan to incorporate these into the curriculum. These opportunities develop pupils' confidence, advocacy skills and civic awareness.
47. Pupils contribute to the school and wider community. They organise fundraising events. They lead charity initiatives and participate in local activities, including visits to local care homes. Leadership roles such as house captains, eco council members and charity ambassadors promote teamwork and civic engagement. Pupils show maturity and responsibility in these roles. Group work in lessons and co-curricular activities further supports pupils' social development and collaboration skills.
48. The school actively promotes equality and inclusion. Pupils learn about diverse identities and different family structures. Teachers ensure gender and cultural balance in leadership roles and classroom content. Pupils demonstrate fairness in their relationships. They show an inclusive mindset in their everyday interactions.
49. Pupils' moral development is a central focus. Pupils are taught to make ethical choices through assemblies, discussions and consistent staff modelling. They understand the consequences of their actions and reflect thoughtfully on their behaviour. In the early years, staff model kindness and respect, helping children build strong social habits and care for others in their environment.
50. Careers education begins early and is well established. Pupils explore a wide range of future pathways through careers days, visiting professional speakers and the creation of digital curriculum vitae. Pupils speak knowledgeably about their aspirations, workplace expectations and interview skills. The careers programme is inclusive, aspirational and supports pupils' long-term planning.

51. Economic education is embedded across the curriculum. Pupils gain a practical understanding of budgeting, saving and financial planning through PSHE and enterprise projects. They gain real-world experience through managing stalls at the school's Christmas fayre and other fundraising activities. They have a confident understanding of personal finance and demonstrate awareness of taxation and money management.
52. Pupils are taught about public services through curriculum links, assemblies and visiting speakers. They learn about institutions such as the national health service, emergency services and local government. These experiences help pupils to appreciate the role of public services in British society and understand civic responsibility.

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

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

Safeguarding

54. Leaders and staff prioritise pupils' safety and wellbeing at all times. Leaders implement rigorous safeguarding procedures, ensuring consistent and effective practices. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities have secure knowledge and experience. The safeguarding team analyse trends in safeguarding matters and use their findings to shape staff training. They maintain secure and thorough safeguarding records. They document the rationale for the decisions they make. If any concerns arise about adults, including low-level concerns, leaders act immediately and record details carefully. They ensure appropriate contact with the local authority designated officer when necessary.
55. Safeguarding leaders train staff effectively and use a range of activities to deepen staff knowledge and confirm understanding. The safeguarding team embed safeguarding into the induction process, ensuring new staff understand and are equipped to carry out their responsibilities. Leaders follow local authority guidance and remain aware of contextual safeguarding issues such as county lines and online safety.
56. Governors oversee safeguarding effectively. The nominated governor works closely with safeguarding leaders. Governors undertake regular training and review safeguarding reports thoroughly. This gives them a clear picture of safeguarding and pastoral concerns. Leaders carry out stringent recruitment processes. All required safer recruitment checks are completed before appointments are made. These checks are recorded accurately in a single central record.
57. The safeguarding team operates efficiently. Deputy designated safeguarding leads (DDSLs) support pastoral teams across the school. Academic and pastoral teams collaborate closely. Concerns are promptly reported to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), ensuring appropriate support for pupils. The DSL works alongside children's services, the police and other agencies to strengthen safeguarding systems and make sure vulnerable pupils get the help they need.
58. Pupils are taught about personal safety, online risks and social media use. They articulate their learning confidently and use multiple reporting avenues, including anonymous reporting to let staff know their worries or concerns. Leaders implement thorough monitoring and filtering systems to ensure safe and appropriate internet use. They test the effectiveness of these systems regularly and adjust controls as needed.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Town Close School
Department for Education number	926/6111
Registered charity number	311293
Address	Town Close School 14 Ipswich Road Norwich Norfolk NR2 2LR
Phone number	01603 620180
Email address	headsec@townclose.com
Website	www.townclose.com
Proprietor	Town Close Educational Trust Limited
Chair	Mrs Sarah Anthony
Headteacher	Mr Nick Tiley-Nunn
Age range	2 to 14
Number of pupils	428
Date of previous inspection	21 January 2022

Information about the school

60. Town Close School is a co-educational day school, close to the centre of Norwich. Situated in wooded grounds, it occupies the original buildings as well as purpose-built teaching spaces. The school comprises the pre-prep department for pupils aged between two and seven years and the prep department for pupils aged between seven and 14 years. The school was founded in 1932. It is a charitable trust, overseen by a board of governors. Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a new headteacher.
61. There are 87 children in the early years comprising one Nursery class and three Reception classes.
62. The school has identified 56 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
63. English is an additional language for 79 pupils.
64. The school states its aim is to make the most out of every moment in guiding children to not only become great pupils, but more importantly great people.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

17 to 19 June 2025

65. A team of 4 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

66. Inspection activities included:

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

67. 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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