

Material change inspection report

17 July 2026

Underley Garden School

Kirkby Lonsdale

Carnforth

LA6 2DZ

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’.

Inspection outcome

The school has submitted a material change request to increase the school's total pupil capacity from 104 to 145.

The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school Standards if the material change is implemented. It is recommended that the material change be approved.

Inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

ISSR paragraphs 7(a) and 7(b), 11, 12, 14, 16

1. Leaders promote a robust culture of safeguarding. The school's safeguarding policies and procedures reflect the latest statutory guidance, and suitable safeguarding training and regular updates help staff to understand their roles. Staff are alert to the signs of concern, including identifying those pupils who may be at risk of harm, and they use the mechanisms for reporting any concerns promptly. They are knowledgeable about contextual safeguarding risks, including the risks associated with social media, extremism and radicalisation, and leaders take suitable steps to mitigate these risks.
2. Safeguarding leaders are knowledgeable about their role and responsibilities. They work effectively with external agencies, including children's services, the police and the local authority to make appropriate referrals swiftly, and to seek their expertise about complex safeguarding issues. The safeguarding team works closely with staff to put in place appropriate risk assessments and support to help protect individual vulnerable pupils from harm.
3. A comprehensive staff code of conduct is in place and is understood by staff. Leaders have ensured that staff know how to recognise and report any concerns about the behaviour of adults, including self-referral, when any conduct falls below agreed professional standards. A record of low-level concerns is suitably maintained by leaders to allow for any patterns in the behaviour of adults working in the school to be identified and addressed. Records of safeguarding concerns are rigorously maintained and held securely by leaders, and include the rationale for leaders' actions and how concerns are followed up.
4. The proprietor and governors monitor safeguarding procedures through regular meetings with staff, an annual review of safeguarding procedures and the implementation of practice, which helps to ensure effective oversight of safeguarding.
5. The school teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Pupils' usage of digital technology across the school is carefully supervised through robust monitoring and filtering of the school's internet.
6. Pupils know they can share their worries and concerns with trusted adults. Notices displaying members of the safeguarding team and how to contact them are displayed throughout the school.
7. The proprietor and governors have drawn up a suitable health and safety policy in accordance with the current health and safety legislation and guidance which is effectively implemented by leaders. Required maintenance checks are conducted routinely and recorded systematically. Health and safety systems are rigorously and consistently implemented to help keep pupils safe. The proprietor, governors and leaders have planned the refurbishment of buildings and classrooms effectively to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers.

8. Leaders ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Regular fire drills help pupils to know what to do and where to go in the event of a fire. Appropriate fire safety equipment, such as emergency lighting, fire alarms and extinguishers, is checked regularly. Appropriate fire risk assessment measures are put in place by leaders for all buildings.
9. Appropriate staffing levels ensure that pupils are supervised effectively throughout the school day, including during transition periods and at break and lunchtimes. Additional staff have been appointed to ensure suitable levels of supervision for the proposed increase in the number of pupils.
10. Leaders ensure that suitable risk assessments are sufficiently detailed and reviewed regularly. Leaders take appropriate action to identify and mitigate risks to pupils across all aspects of school life, including hazardous areas, food allergies, hygiene and preparation, fire and off-site visits.
11. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

ISSR paragraphs 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

12. The proprietor, governors and leaders ensure that safer recruitment procedures are carried out diligently by suitably trained and knowledgeable staff.
13. All the required pre-employment checks are meticulously undertaken and accurately recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR) before adults commence work at the school.
14. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

ISSR paragraphs 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31

15. Suitable renovation and refurbishment of existing school buildings have been carried out to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers.
16. Leaders ensure that the premises and facilities are clean and well maintained. They have implemented a thorough and rigorous approach to maintenance so that any issues that arise are rectified swiftly.
17. A suitable number of toilets, washing and changing facilities, including showers, have been provided for pupils' use, and provide appropriate levels of privacy. An adequate supply of hot and cold water is provided. The temperature of hot water is carefully controlled and monitored by leaders at the point of use to minimise the risk of scalding to users.
18. Appropriate first aid and medical facilities are provided for pupils across the school, including those with complex medical needs.
19. Leaders have given careful consideration to the installation of noise-reducing acoustic panels to support the learning of pupils with autism. External and internal lighting, heating and ventilation systems are suitable, and there is an appropriate supply of drinking water.
20. The school's grounds provide suitable outdoor space for physical education, play, recreation and socialising, and this will accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers.
21. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

Part 6. Provision of information

ISSR paragraph 32(1)(c)

- 22. Leaders ensure that the safeguarding policy is made available to parents on the school's website.
- 23. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

Part 8. Quality of leadership and management of schools

ISSR paragraph 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)

- 24. The proprietor and governors maintain robust oversight of the school's provision and performance. Through supportive and robust monitoring of leaders' work, they have ensured that leaders have the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure the Standards are met consistently.
- 25. The proprietor, governors and school leaders have planned carefully the proposed material change. They have worked assiduously with stakeholders to ensure that the refurbished buildings and classrooms align with autism-specific and therapeutic design principles. Members of the central team, in partnership with school leaders, have meticulously considered the implications, potential risks and likely impact of the additional classes for the proposed increase in the school's population.
- 26. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

School details

School	Underley Garden School
Department for Education number	943/6044
Address	Underley Garden School Kirkby Lonsdale Carnforth Lancashire LA6 2DZ
Phone number	01524 271 569
Email address	info@underleygarden.org
Website	www.underleygarden.co.uk
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Mr Richard Power
Headteacher	Miss April Boyd
Age range	5 to 19
Number of pupils	95
Date of previous inspection	13 to 15 May 2025

Information about the school

27. Underley Garden School is an independent co-educational special school for pupils with autism, severe learning difficulties and/or social, emotional and mental health needs. It is located in the market town of Kirkby Lonsdale, near Carnforth in Lancashire. Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority. The school's performance is overseen by board of governors. It was previously inspected by Ofsted.
28. The school has identified 95 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. All pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
29. The school has identified very few pupils for whom English is an additional language.
30. The school states that its aims are to care for and educate its children, empowering them to reach their full potential, to think big and dream bigger.

Purpose of the material change inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection following an application made by the school to the Department for Education to make a material change to the school's provision. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about whether the school is likely to meet the Independent School Standards

Inspection details

Inspection dates

17 July 2026

31. Two reporting inspectors visited the school for one day.

32. Inspection activities included:

- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school and information available on the school's website
- a tour of the school site to see the current school facilities and the buildings and classrooms that have been refurbished to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers
- discussion with the chair of governors/regional director
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils.

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

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