



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports
For Schools with Residential Provision**

Ashdown House School

November 2018



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School's Details

School	Ashdown House School		
DfE number	845/6001		
Registered charity number	309639		
Address	Forest Row East Sussex RH18 5JY		
Telephone number	01342 822574		
Email address	secretary@ashdownhouse.com		
Headmaster	Mr Mike Davies		
Proprietor	The Cothill Trust		
Age range	7 to 13		
Number of pupils on roll	103		
	Boys	66	Girls 37
	Day pupils	36	Boarders 67
	Juniors	51	Seniors 52
Inspection dates	20 to 22 November 2018		

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Ashdown House School is an independent day and boarding school for boys and girls aged between seven and thirteen years. Since 2009, it has been part of the Cothill Trust, and operates as a charitable trust supported by an advisory board. The school opened in 1843 in Brighton and moved to its current location 50 years later.
- 1.2 Pupils may board from the age of eight and boarders are accommodated in the main school building. Since the last inspection a new post of head of boarding has been created, and the current headmaster took up his post in June 2018. The school no longer admits pupils below Year 3.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to stimulate, encourage and challenge all children within a home from home environment that is kind, trusting and based on strong Christian values; to provide a happy, safe and secure boarding environment, which it intends to inspire children through richness of opportunity and foster a strong sense of community, and to prepare children to thrive in the world beyond Ashdown.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional and business backgrounds, from British and overseas families. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 22 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, 11 of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil in the school has an education, health and care plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 18 pupils, 13 of whom receive additional support. Data used by the school have identified 15 pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for a number of other pupils because of their special talents in sport, music, art or drama.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

This inspection also contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools ('boarding NMS'). It also comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and it judges the extent to which the school currently meets the boarding NMS. It identifies any standards which the school does not meet and requires action to meet them. Findings are distributed across sections relating to the eight Parts of the standards.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards, including the boarding NMS, may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards, including the boarding NMS. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as met or as not met. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management, together with the NMS covering the same areas. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools.](#)

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015 and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.6 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 17 and 19 are met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.8 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family and access to a programme of activities. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996, and NMS 2–4, 6–12, 15 and 16 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors and a register is kept as required. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 14 are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for their medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.13 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 5 are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.14 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. These include details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. They also include particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.
- 2.15 **The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and statement of boarding principles [NMS 1] are met.**

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.
- 2.17 **The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 18 are met.**

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.
- 2.19 **The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] and NMS 13 are met.**

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Class 1	Year 8
Class 2	Year 7
Class 3	Year 6
Class 4	Year 5
Class 5	Year 4 and Year 3

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- Pupils' develop good knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum, with excellent creative and aesthetic development.
 - Pupils develop many talents beyond the classroom, thanks to the wide range of opportunities available to them.
 - Pupils' writing skills and their use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum are not as strong as they could be.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils are confident, independent and resilient with well-developed social skills.
 - Pupils are very accepting of others from different backgrounds and cultures.
 - Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school community.
 - Pupils have a very strong moral framework and know how to behave well.

Recommendations

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:
- Strengthen pupils' skills in writing and ability to write at length.
 - Extend pupils' ability to apply their skills in ICT across the curriculum.

The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.5 Pupils demonstrate good knowledge and understanding in their work across the curriculum, and show that they are developing the various skills necessary in different subjects. In history, for example, they can look at original source material and interpret what it tells them, while in science they understand that they need to draw conclusions from the tests they carry out. Pupils show excellent creative and aesthetic skills. In art and in design and technology (DT), they understand, and can explain, how to use different techniques to create different effects, and are successful achieving the desired outcomes, for example when pupils at the top end of the school were making nesting boxes for birds. In drama, pupils' performance skills are excellent, and all ages are confident about performing before others. Pupils' success is a result of the knowledge and enthusiasm of subject specialist teachers who are able to motivate and inspire their classes. All the pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that their teachers help them to learn and make progress, and this view was echoed by most parents in their questionnaire responses.
- 3.6 The school does not enter pupils for national curriculum tests but evidence from school data, pupils' books and lesson observations shows that attainment across the school is above national age-related expectations. The school does not select pupils by ability and so pupils enter with a range of different starting points. Pupils of all abilities make good progress over time. Those with SEND or EAL make similar progress to their classmates thanks to the intensive, high-quality extra support they receive. Higher-ability pupils are enabled to achieve well because of the level of challenge they receive at the top end of the school, so that they can make rapid progress. This was clear in the quality and quantity of work in Year 8 books.

- 3.7 Pupils are highly articulate and can express their ideas clearly and intelligibly. Most listen well and respond with relevant and succinct answers to questions, such as when pupils in a geography lesson were able to use technical language to discuss microclimates. Results from tests show that pupils' reading skills are also well-developed. Pupils at the top end of the school write very competently for their age, but there is less evidence for this further down the school. This is because written work in this part of the school particularly in English, is effectively marked with high levels of challenge and setting of targets for further improvement. Elsewhere in the school, high expectations for standards of work are not always evident and corrections are not always followed up by staff, with the result that pupils do not learn from their mistakes. Pupils do not always present their written work in a neat and tidy way, and they are not always asked to make their handwriting more legible.
- 3.8 In numeracy, pupils demonstrate solid foundations of knowledge and understanding, and are able to build reliably on these, as a result of systematic, supportive and well-planned teaching. Pupils show that they can apply their numeracy skills in other areas such as art, DT and science, calculating proportions and dimensions, and expressing test findings in graphs. They are developing useful problem-solving skills, in response to the school's current focus on improving this aspect of their knowledge. In a mathematics lesson, pupils applied their understanding of squared and cubed numbers to solve problems.
- 3.9 Pupils are very competent and confident users of ICT as their work in discrete lessons and clubs clearly demonstrates. In ICT club, for example, pupils of all ages happily tackled programmes in English, mathematics and science to underpin their knowledge in those subjects. Similarly, pupils belonging to the animation club produced some excellent short films using tablet computers. Pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to use ICT in the course of their studies. The youngest pupils in the school were able to conduct research using the internet in history, while the oldest pupils did the same for their geography project. However, although the provision for ICT has improved since it was a recommendation in the previous inspection, for example with the introduction of whiteboards and projectors, it is not yet strongly embedded across the curriculum. This is because it is not systematically planned for daily use in lessons across the school. As a result, pupils are not used to applying their ICT skills in all their learning.
- 3.10 Pupils have well-developed study skills, demonstrating in lessons that they are able to work things out and think for themselves, and that they have strategies for overcoming difficulties without immediate recourse to an adult. Older pupils in a Latin lesson worked calmly and with application, for example. Skilful use of questioning by teachers and the supportive, encouraging atmosphere in class mean that pupils feel able to venture their ideas without fear of ridicule. Pupils in an English lesson on 'fake news', for example, showed that they could identify how to distinguish fact from opinion. In interviews, pupils explained how they know how to use the 'three before me' strategy of 'brain, book, buddy' to help themselves in class when they were stuck, before putting their hand up for assistance. Pupils' attitudes to learning are similarly positive. They are keen and eager in class, occasionally to the point of exuberance. Most teachers manage this well with high expectations for behaviour and strategies for channelling enthusiasm effectively into the task in hand. Most pupils settle quickly and quietly to their tasks and stay focused until they have completed them, as a result of teachers' high expectations for their application to their work.

3.11 Pupils show an excellent capacity for making the most of the many opportunities they have to achieve outside the classroom, thanks to leaders' and proprietors' concerted efforts to offer them an inclusive environment where each pupil has the chance to find out what they are good at. All parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that the range of subjects offered was suitable for their child, and almost all felt that the school provides a suitable range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils achieve success in diverse areas such as in the UK Maths Challenge, in singing and instrumental tuition, in their painting, sculpture and ceramics, in their frequent drama productions and in their sporting events, as individuals and teams. This success is reflected in the high proportion of scholarships to their senior schools gained by pupils, notwithstanding the fact that the cohorts in the top year are small. Most pupils achieve places at their first choice of senior school, because of the carefully considered, individual support they receive from staff.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.12 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.13 Pupils are confident and resilient, with an awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses and the capacity to take risks when trying out something new. These qualities are apparent in pupils' everyday lives around school. For example, pupils of all ages rehearsing for choir concerts and drama productions made every effort to do their best in their performances, and were not discouraged by exhortations to improve which made them want to try even harder to be the best they could. The expectations and challenge offered by staff for pupils' personal development makes a significant contribution to their all-round achievements. Pupils know that the school celebrates their success, for example in the regular 'show-up' assembly, and feel motivated to match teachers' aspirations for them. Pupils show themselves to feel happy, safe and secure in line with the school's aims, which are successfully realised thanks to the quality of supportive relationships within the school which mean that each pupil is very well known to staff. Pupils develop independence and self-reliance through boarding where they have the chance to take responsibility for themselves and their daily well-being, so that they have the skills to thrive beyond the school, in accordance with its aims. Pupils understand the impact the decisions they make will have on their future happiness, particularly when preparing for moving on, and speak positively of the thoughtful guidance they and their parents receive in the choice of their next school.
- 3.14 Pupils have well-developed social skills and make an excellent contribution to the school community. They collaborate very efficiently together in their daily lives and activities, and support one another for a common purpose. For example, the youngest pupils in the school were seen working together productively for their class play, showing appreciation of what others could do, waiting patiently to take their turn and finding ways for the group to do things better. Older pupils exhibit a sense of care towards the younger ones, for example in inspection interviews when they helped them chairs and places to put them, and younger pupils respond positively to this. The ethos of teamwork and care engendered by school leaders and proprietors helps promote these qualities. Boarding makes a valuable contribution with opportunities for pupils to carry out daily duties and take part in weekly house meetings. This helps the school to meet its aim of fostering a strong sense of community. Every pupil who responded to the questionnaire said that the school helped them to be confident and independent, and almost all parents felt the same. All parents who responded said that boarding had supported their child's personal development.
- 3.15 Pupils respond eagerly to the many good opportunities they have to make a contribution to the school and the wider community. Thanks to the efforts of staff to provide these opportunities, pupils make a difference to school life through, for example, their work on the school council, where they canvass and report back on the views of their peers, or as eco-warriors, helping to look after the school environment. Through house matches and competitions, boarders develop strong team spirit and a sense of striving for the greater good. Pupils also take a pride in fund-raising for local, national and international charities, or undertaking practical tasks such as baking bread for a local shelter for the homeless.

- 3.16 Pupils come from a wide range of different backgrounds and cultures at home and abroad, and are accepting of one another's differences naturally and easily in their daily life. The school ethos and the example set by staff form the foundations for this, together with the school's programmes for religious studies and for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE). Pupils show that they know about the major religions of the world, and that they reflect on attitudes to difference and to individuality. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, pupils' eyes lit up as they showed that they grasped the concept of transfiguration. Pupils get on well with one another and show consideration for the needs of others. They have an appreciation of the non-material aspects of life, valuing their natural surroundings and demonstrate a respectful attitude to prayers and times for reflection in chapel and in assembly. The vast majority of pupils and parents who responded to the questionnaire said that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people.
- 3.17 Through their behaviour in class and around the school, pupils show that they understand the school rules and that they know what behaviour is acceptable, and what is not. This is because the school has high expectations for behaviour which are made explicit to all pupils. Staff are excellent role models for pupils to copy, and relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pupils experience a consistency of approach across day and boarding time, so that they are sure what is expected of them. Older pupils are able to ponder on questions of morality and right and wrong, for example in an English lesson where images of contemporary life provoked empathetic discussion on what is fair and what is not fair, and on issues such as the possible reasons for homelessness.
- 3.18 Pupils understand the importance of staying safe physically and online, and can explain clearly what they should or should not do to ensure this. They know what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and can talk about how to live one, including strategies for overcoming examination stress and anxiety. The high quality of pastoral care and support from staff in the school plays a key role in making sure that pupils are safe and healthy, and understand how to remain so, with an increased focus on pupils' mental health and well-being. Guidance on the use of technology is plentiful in ICT and PSHEE lessons, and there is a wealth of personal, targeted support available through school counsellors, independent listeners, mentors and art therapy. Pupils spoke openly about how these services help them and were keen to point out the 'Are you happy?' posters around the school, which set out all the options open to them if they need to talk to someone. Pupils relish the many opportunities they have for being active, and understand how to make healthy choices at mealtimes, supported by boarding staff who check what goes onto their plate at the beginning of the meal, and what remains at the end.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chief executive officer of the trust, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended chapel and an assembly. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Jane Chesterfield	Reporting inspector
Mr Jonathan Onions	Compliance team inspector (Head of boarding, IAPS school)
Mr Kit Thompson	Team inspector (Headmaster, IAPS school)
Ms Deborah Mills	Team inspector for boarding (Headmistress, IAPS school)