



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ASHDOWN HOUSE SCHOOL

INTEGRATED INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Full Name of School	Ashdown House School
DfE Number	845/6001
Registered Charity Number	309639
Address	Ashdown House School Ashdown House Forest Row East Sussex RH18 5JY England UK
Telephone Number	01342 822574
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Email Address	secretary@ashdownhouse.com
Headmaster	Mr Dominic Floyd
Principal of the Trust	Mr Adrian Richardson
Age Range	7 to 13
Total Number of Pupils	131
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (71 boys; 60 girls)
Numbers by Age	7-11: 51 11-13: 80
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 27
Number of Boarders	Total: 104 Full: 104
Inspection dates	15 May 2012 to 18 May 2012

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in October 2008

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed through the following link: www.legislation.gov.uk. Search for Independent School Standards Regulations and enter date 2010, to find Schedule 1, Parts 1-7.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Equality Act 2010 (including race, gender, special educational needs and/or disabilities).
- (ii) The School Standards and Framework Act 1998, banning corporal punishment.

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

Under Government arrangements, the inspection of boarding became an integrated part of ISI inspections from 1 September 2011. This inspection contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education, personal development and welfare. Boarding inspections were previously carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills. The relevant Ofsted report refers to an inspection in October 2008 and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where Achievement is 'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade.** Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. **For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the**

same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the principal of the trust, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Penny Horsman

Mrs Elizabeth Hill

Mr Steven Smerdon

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Reporting Inspector

Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)

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CONTENTS

	Page
1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL	1
2 THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL	2
(a) Main findings	2
(b) Action points	3
(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements	3
(ii) Recommendations for further improvement	3
3 THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS	4
(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning	4
(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)	4
(c) The contribution of teaching	5
4 THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	7
(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils	7
(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care	7
(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety	8
(d) The quality of boarding	9
5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	11
(a) The quality of governance	11
(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians	11

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Ashdown House School is a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils between the ages of 7 and 13, located in 35 acres of parkland near Forest Row in Sussex. It was originally founded in 1843 as a boys' boarding school in Brighton, where it was known as Connaught House. It moved to its present site in 1893 and became known as Ashdown House. Girls were admitted for the first time in 1974 and in 1975 the school became a charitable trust. In 2009 it merged with the Cothill Educational Trust whose one board now govern and oversee this school and seven others, including two in France.
- 1.2 The school aims to stimulate, encourage, challenge and nurture the talents and potential of the pupils academically, pastorally and socially in a warm, kind and trusting home-from-home environment. It strives to equip every pupil to cope and succeed in the outside world beyond Ashdown. Since the merger with the Cothill Trust, all pupils are afforded the opportunity to spend a term in France in their penultimate year and younger pupils spend a short time at one of the trust's other schools in Dorset and/or France.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection, 131 pupils were on roll, 71 boys and 60 girls. There are 51 pupils in Years 3 to 6 and 80 pupils in Years 7 and 8. One hundred and four pupils board with all pupils boarding for their final three years. The boarders are organised into four houses each with resident house parents. Pupils come mainly from professional families who live in the south of England with a small minority of pupils coming either from families born overseas or from British families where parents live and work overseas. The school has identified 26 pupils as needing support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), all of whom receive support. Nineteen pupils have English as an additional language (EAL) and 16 of these receive support.
- 1.4 The overall ability of the pupils is above the national average, with most pupils having an ability that is at least above average.
- 1.5 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum equivalence is shown in the following table.

1.6

School	NC name
5s	Years 3 and 4
4s	Year 5
3s	Year 6
2s	Year 7
1s	Year 8

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 Ashdown House successfully fulfils its aims to stimulate, encourage, and nurture the talents and potential of its pupils, academically, pastorally and socially in a warm, kind and trusting home-from-home environment which prepares them for life beyond the school. Pupils of all ages, whether they are day pupils or boarders, are well educated, enjoy school and make good progress. All staff are committed to the care and well-being of the pupils in their charge. Teaching is good overall but there is an inconsistency in provision. On occasions, the style of teaching does not encourage independent thought. Sport, music and drama, together with the wide range of visits and activities and the good curriculum, enhance the pupils' learning and development. Their exemplary behaviour and positive attitudes to learning also contribute to their effective progress. However, the use of ICT across the curriculum is limited. All pupils, including those with SEND, EAL and the most able, flourish in a secure and happy community. Consequently achievement is good, enabling most pupils to secure places at the school of their first choice.
- 2.2 The excellent pastoral care encourages pupils to learn and contributes significantly to their outstanding personal development. Boarding pupils have a very positive experience and are well supported. Overseas boarders are fully integrated into the life of the school community. The friendly relationships between staff and pupils and pupils themselves are a particularly strong feature of the school. In this caring and happy environment the pupils grow into confident, mature young people who are thoroughly prepared for the next stage of their lives and their future well-being. The arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is sound; attendance registers are not accurately maintained as required and electrical equipment is not regularly tested.
- 2.3 The good leadership and management, together with enthusiastic staff, and the support of the trust, ensure the ethos and values of the school are successfully maintained. Parents' replies to the pre-inspection questionnaires indicated that the vast majority are extremely happy with the education provided and the high standard of care. A few parents expressed dissatisfaction with the way the school has handled concerns, information they receive about their child's progress and also felt that there was some bullying. Inspectors investigated all of these issues thoroughly and found no evidence to support these views. The school has made good progress in response to the recommendations of the previous inspection. A development plan has been written. The management team have also ensured that procedures have been devised for the monitoring of planning and teaching although this is not yet fully developed. Governance is good and since taking over the school the trust has strengthened the senior leadership. However, most trust members do not have insight into the day-to-day life of the school and as a body do not yet ensure that the school is fully compliant with regulatory requirements including their own annual review of safeguarding. Arrangements for recording the presence of boarders at all times are informal. All staff working at the school are checked with the Criminal Records Bureau but procedures for recording details of staff appointments are not robust.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is available through the link described in the Preface)

2.4 The school does not meet all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010, and therefore it is required to:

- ensure that the full board of governors undertakes an annual review of child protection policy and procedures [Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8, under Welfare, health and safety; and, for the same reason, National Minimum Standard 11, under Child protection];
- ensure that electrical testing is carried out regularly and records kept [Part 3, paragraph 11, under Welfare, health and safety; and, for the same reason, National Minimum Standard 6, under Safety of boarders];
- ensure that attendance registers for day pupils are completed twice daily [Part 3, paragraph 17, under Welfare, health and safety];
- ensure that the single central register is completed accurately [Part 4, paragraph 22(3)(a) to (g), (4), (6) and (7), under Suitability of staff and proprietors; and, for the same reason, National Minimum Standard 14.1, under Staff recruitment and checks on other adults].

2.5 The school does not meet all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011 as specified above, and therefore in addition to the action points above it must:

- formalise procedures for checking the whereabouts of boarders at all times [National Minimum Standard 15.5, under Staffing and supervision].

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Share the best practice in teaching at the school and improve the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure consistency of practice across the school.
2. Extend the appraisal system to all staff to aid the identification of professional development needs.
3. Raise the profile of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum and throughout the school.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning is good.
- 3.2 Pupils are well educated and successful in their learning across the curriculum and in their activities. In lessons and in their written work they show strong understanding and make good progress. The school successfully fulfils its aim to stimulate, encourage and nurture the academic talents and potential of its pupils.
- 3.3 Pupils generally listen well to each other. They speak and read with confidence from an early age and often engage in classroom discussion with their teachers, which enhances their learning. They are articulate and confident when speaking with adults. They acquire good mathematical skills and are able to use these to very good effect; for example, older pupils were able to apply the 'nth term' in sequences. ICT skills are developed well in the discrete lessons offered to younger pupils but older pupils do not use it regularly across the curriculum as a tool for independent learning or research. Logical thought is successfully developed, such as when younger pupils discovered problems and found their solutions when designing vehicles in DT. Pupils' physical skills develop well in the numerous opportunities for sport and recreational activity which abound both within and outside the curriculum. Boarders are afforded even more opportunities after school and at weekends. School teams and individuals have been successful at local, regional and national level in a variety of sports including football, cricket, netball, archery and swimming. Well-developed creative skills are evident in pupils' art work, and all around the school attractive and interesting displays demonstrate the use of a wide variety of media. Many of the pupils learn musical instruments and success rate in examinations is high. Groups from the school have performed in opera at Glyndebourne and also sung at the Royal Albert Hall.
- 3.4 Pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance in national tests but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be high in relation to national age-related expectations. This level of attainment, as judged, indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. This includes pupils with SEND or EAL who are given help by the specialist staff in the learning support department. Evidence of improvement in their writing was seen in their books and in conversation with them. The most able pupils are provided with opportunities in the small teaching groups to progress rapidly. When they leave the school, many pupils transfer to the senior school of their first choice, some with scholarships; these include awards for art, music, sport and DT as well as for academic excellence.
- 3.5 Pupils thrive in the atmosphere of hard work, enjoyment and effort. Their attitude to their work is excellent and they take pride in both their achievements and those of others. During lessons they generally sustain high levels of concentration and, when given the opportunity, work well together.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision

- 3.6 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is good.
- 3.7 Pupils benefit from an effective coverage of the requisite areas of learning and the curriculum is suitable for the needs of pupils of all ages and abilities. It helps the school to fulfil its aim to stimulate and nurture the talents of the pupils. The

curriculum supports their academic achievement and aids their good progress. In some subjects it provides opportunities for developing the pupils' intellectual curiosity. Chess is taught to all younger pupils and the older pupils benefit from study skills lessons. The curriculum for older pupils includes Greek for the top ability pupils and Latin for all, whilst younger pupils enjoy classical studies. A new personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme of study has been introduced recently which reflects the school's aims and ethos, but its provision is inconsistent, with some of the time allocated to the subject being used for administration in the older year groups. Planning has improved since the previous inspection. Schemes of work are in place, but inconsistency in the documentation exists between subjects. The best practice includes reference to learning intentions and learning outcomes which relate to knowledge, skills and understanding.

- 3.8 Pupils who require additional help with their learning, either because they have SEND or EAL, are catered for well by the learning support department where specialist teachers teach individual and group lessons or offer in-class support if that is more appropriate. Detailed records are kept by the specialists who disseminate information to subject teachers. The most able pupils benefit from the opportunities for more individual help within the small class sizes when preparing for examinations.
- 3.9 The opportunity for pupils to spend a term in their penultimate year at the trust's chateau in Sauveterre, France, enriches the curricular provision and has a strong impact on their personal development. Younger pupils visit another trust property in France for a few days or the trust's rural study centre in Dorset. These visits, along with day trips to places such as museums, galleries and theatres, all add to the pupils' educational experiences. A few links exist with the local community; the local vicar visits to take assemblies and services and final year pupils have been engaged in a litter project locally. Anomalies raised in the previous inspection about classes within the same year receiving different provision have been remedied.
- 3.10 Extra-curricular provision is excellent. A wide range of team and individual sports are available both within and outside the curriculum. In addition a large and varied range of activities take place on Fridays and Saturdays; these range from fishing and gardening to model-making and ballet. Pupils, both boarders and day, were enthusiastic about these activities. Visiting speakers who come during curriculum time and sometimes to speak just to boarders have included olympic athletes and parents with particular specialisms. All pupils enjoyed a visit from the speaker whose topic was the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.11 The quality of teaching is good.
- 3.12 Teaching is mostly effective in promoting pupils progress and supports the aims of the school to stimulate, encourage and nurture individual pupils. The best teaching is characterised by excellent lesson planning and preparation, good pace and time management. It includes a variety of teaching and learning styles in activities and challenging work. This is most evident with older pupils and the very youngest. The most successful lessons also have a sense of purpose and make good use of resources. Where ICT is incorporated into lessons, teaching and learning are enhanced. The rapport between the pupils and their teachers is a significant feature when the teachers understand pupils' needs and engage them in lively debate. In a religious studies lesson about miracles, older pupils responded to the infectious and

enthusiastic approach of the teacher as they applied evaluation skills confidently. Teaching which encourages collaborative work in pairs or groups provides the opportunity for pupils to work independently, as seen in the music lesson where younger pupils created a rhythmic piece without teacher input for performance. The less successful lessons were over-directed and did not engage the pupils in interactions, through an over-reliance on closed questions either in discussion or by the use of worksheets. This resulted in insufficient opportunities to think for themselves and less rapid progress. When pupils are aware of the learning objective in lessons, their knowledge and understanding is enhanced.

- 3.13 High expectations and good subject knowledge are strengths of the teaching. Teachers encourage pupils to take an interest in their work and enjoy it. In an art lesson on surrealism, pupils were clearly inspired; they engaged with the topic well and were able to work independently at a high level. The carefully managed questioning in science with older pupils about the carbon cycle challenged pupils' thinking and promoted understanding. Teachers know their pupils well and this enables all pupils, particularly those with SEND and EAL, to make good progress. Praise and encouragement are regular characteristics of lessons and the pupils respond appropriately. Small classes are a significant feature which allows teaching to offer individual support such as in the examination revision lessons in French and mathematics. Pupils with individual needs are given appropriate help by the learning support department within the class or by withdrawal, which enables them to make good progress. Older pupils are taught in sets to facilitate appropriate challenge for different ability groups.
- 3.14 The 'Jungle Block' is a significant resource for teaching with large well-equipped classrooms and excellent science laboratories. The library has been developed since the previous inspection and is now successfully run by parent helpers. This excellent resource is very popular with the pupils and encourages them to develop a love of reading and research.
- 3.15 Marking is regular and good evidence exists of oral feedback and follow-up with individual pupils about how to improve. However, the quality of written comments in books is variable. No overall policy guides practice and this leads to inconsistency between subjects. The best practice within the school includes positive, constructive, written comments with target-setting to direct the learner. Senior management has begun to review assessment procedures throughout the school and has recently set up a system to monitor pupils' performance data which is designed to inform teachers of the next steps in learning for their pupils, but this is still in its infancy.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 The school ethos is strongly underpinned by Christian principles, and pupils develop a broad spiritual education which fosters tolerance and an awareness of the non-material aspects of life. Pupils are appreciative of the location of the chapel at the heart of the school, where regular services provide them with opportunities for reflection and prayer. Pupils respect the views and beliefs of others and are happy to discuss matters of faith, speaking about abstract issues with confidence. They appreciate their beautiful surroundings and enjoy using the extensive grounds. In a geography lesson, older pupils empathised with how islanders may have felt if they had to leave their island home because of an imminent volcanic eruption. Throughout the school individuality is respected and nurtured alongside opportunities to grow and flourish. Pupils express pride in both their own successes and those of others and are visibly proud of their school.
- 4.3 Pupils' moral development is excellent. From an early age they know right from wrong and actively take responsibility for their own actions. Their behaviour towards their peers and staff is exemplary; they respect each other and fully appreciate the need to take account of the feelings of others. Raising money for charity promotes their awareness of those less fortunate than themselves both at home and overseas.
- 4.4 Pupils' social development is outstanding. They are gregarious, care for each other and show highly developed social skills. When greeting visitors they are unfailingly polite and welcoming. The strong sense of community which is fostered throughout the school promotes social awareness for all pupils, both day and boarding. School houses, called 'Patrols', which consist of pupils of all ages, promote healthy competition and a sense of belonging to a group for which they must strive to do their best.
- 4.5 Pupils have an excellent appreciation of cultural diversity, enriched by the range of cultures represented in the school. Their awareness of different cultures is highly developed as is their sensitivity to them. They have a good understanding of world faiths and are able to discuss their differences and similarities with confidence. Visiting speakers promote pupils' awareness of world issues such as racism in sport. Pupils relish the opportunity to spend a term in France where they are completely immersed in the local culture and speak, and are taught, in French.
- 4.6 By the time they are ready to transfer to their senior schools at the age of thirteen, pupils' excellent personal development ensures that they are ready for the challenges which lie ahead.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care

- 4.7 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.8 Staff provide outstanding support and guidance for pupils which encourages and nurtures them in a kind and trusting environment and fulfils the aims of the school. Relationships between the staff and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves are excellent. Boarding staff also show excellent support for, and good understanding of, the academic and pastoral needs of the pupils in their care. Concerns raised in the previous inspection about the monitoring of pupils in their free time have been

resolved through a significant increase of members of staff on duty at these key times.

- 4.9 Extensive opportunities for exercise are provided through extra-curricular activities and the sports programme. Opportunities range from outdoor pursuits activities at a local centre to riding. Healthy eating is discreetly monitored by the school nurse at mealtimes and a wide selection of appealing food is enjoyed by the school community, including various themed meals through the year such as those for American Independence Day and Chinese New Year. Healthy snacks are available to boarders in the evenings and include fruit and cereal.
- 4.10 In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, a small minority of pupils expressed concern about bullying within the school but the inspectors found no evidence to support this. Pupils of all ages spoke warmly of relationships with their peers. Older pupils particularly felt that bullying was not an issue but that should an incident occur it would be dealt with swiftly and effectively. A clearly defined and well-monitored system of rewards and sanctions promotes good behaviour. The house or patrol system, which vertically groups the pupils, fosters a sense of identity that is shared across year groups. This arrangement adds a competitive element to the rewards and sanctions system and is very popular.
- 4.11 Pupils feel well supported by the pastoral system and speak with enthusiasm about the adults who care for them. Pupils are confident that there is an adult they could turn to should they encounter a difficulty or have a problem. Pupils feel that staff listen to their views informally as well as through formal channels such as the school council or the food committee. The recent installation of play equipment was at the pupils' request through their council.
- 4.12 The school has a suitable plan to improve educational access for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

4.(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.13 The arrangements for welfare health and safety are sound.
- 4.14 The child protection policy has regard to official guidance in content, but is not implemented correctly with regard to its annual review or the recording of the recruitment checks undertaken on staff. All staff are trained in child protection and the designated child protection officer has received training at the higher, inter-agency level. Appropriate measures are taken to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards, but electrical testing has not been carried out regularly. Checks and tests on fire safety appliances are carried out and recorded. Evacuation practices take place regularly including at night for the boarders.
- 4.15 The health and safety committee which meets termly, is made up mainly of trust members who do not work on site and are not involved with day-to-day health and safety issues which may arise. The responsibility for this area rests with the headmaster and monitoring procedures are not currently rigorous enough.
- 4.16 Health care is thorough and effective. Pupils, who are ill, injured or have SEND are well cared for by the school nurse or by staff trained in first aid. The medical room is well-equipped and appropriate for its needs. Accident and incident books are maintained efficiently. The admission register is maintained accurately but there are not sufficiently robust procedures for the twice-daily registration of day pupils.

4.(d) The quality of boarding

- 4.17 The quality of boarding is good overall.
- 4.18 The outcomes for boarders are excellent. The positive opportunities that boarders experience enable them to develop excellent inter-personal skills with staff and their peers. Boarders are extremely confident when they greet visitors and are courteous and well mannered. The effective organisation, positive relationships and congenial atmosphere, help the boarders to excel in their personal development. They appreciate differing cultural and ethnic needs, which results in an outstanding sense of mutual respect. The close relationship between boarders and boarding staff is a great strength of the school and girls and boys display exemplary behaviour. The boarders are at ease and enjoy their life within their different boarding areas. They are proud to contribute to the smooth running of boarding, supporting new boarders and even helping each other to change bedding on a weekly basis. Many of the boarders are school prefects and are allocated duties varying from keeper of the school clock to chapel monitors. Boarders feel that their voice is heard through the school council, food committee and informal chats with house parents. Daily newspapers are available to enrich understanding of national and international issues. Filtered internet access is available as is the opportunity to watch the news before going to breakfast.
- 4.19 The quality of the boarding provision and care is excellent. House parents take a real interest in the boarders' well-being and monitor the pastoral care through individual pupil pastoral books which are filled in daily. Effective arrangements exist for the laundry and storage of pupils' possessions and clothing. A good induction process for new boarders uses a buddy system and new boarders receive a handbook, informing them about all aspects of boarding. The school uses a specialist EAL teacher to further support the needs of the international pupils. Boarders are able to contact their parents and families through the use of telephones, email access and the internet within the different boarding areas. Opportunities for worship which cater for boarders with different religious beliefs are available. Boarders enjoy the wide variety of activities available, which make use of the school's excellent facilities and grounds. An exciting recreational programme is planned for the weekends, which is enjoyed by most of the boarders. These include visits to local attractions and well-planned activities on site.
- 4.20 The boarding accommodation is comfortable and secure, but the décor in some areas of the boys' boarding is variable in quality. An appropriate number of toilets and washroom facilities are spread amongst the accommodation; these are well maintained and clean. Detailed risk assessments for different aspects of boarding life and for fire safety are clear and regular fire practices are carried out within the boarding house. The boarders enjoy relaxing in the different common rooms, which are organised by year groups and gender. A time-out dormitory is available for boarders who feel homesick or who want a quiet area. The school shop enables boarders to access items of stationery or personal hygiene. A well-resourced surgery with appropriately trained, professional staff, offers a warm and caring environment to the boarders if they have medical problems. Should the need arise, they are looked after in separate gender sick bays within the boarding accommodation. The school has good links with the local doctor, who visits weekly, and a local dentist. The catering staff are aware of the boarders' dietary needs and they produce a varied and nutritious menu. Mealtimes are well-ordered social occasions, which are enjoyed by the boarders. Many of the teaching staff live on the school site and attend meals with the boarders, creating a strong family

environment. During the evening, boarders can enjoy a selection of snacks and drinks. Boarders commented on their enjoyment of special theme nights such as the Burns supper. The Sunday roast lunch is a particular highlight. Any issue or complaint which boarders raise is dealt with through their pastoral logs which are monitored by staff or, if the complaint is from parents and cannot be resolved informally, the school complaints procedure is used.

- 4.21 An appropriate policy for safeguarding is understood by staff who all have checks with the Criminal Records Bureau, though some staff recruitment checks are not accurately recorded. Safeguarding training is regular and up-to-date. Posters on display around the boarding accommodation ensure that boarders have the names and contact numbers of appropriate adults outside the school community from whom they can seek advice. Bullying is not identified as an issue amongst the boarders and they know that there are a number of adults available to talk to both within and outside the school community. The close relationship between boarders and boarding staff is a great strength of the school and girls and boys display exemplary behaviour. Boarders know which staff are on duty each evening through well-maintained notice boards and a clear structure to routines, although no formal arrangements are in place for checking boarders' presence. Members of the school senior management team support the boarding staff each evening and their presence adds to the pastoral care. Staffing levels are appropriate for both the boys' and girls' boarding houses.
- 4.22 The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the boarding provision is good. A suitable statement of the school's boarding principles and practice is available to boarders, staff and parents. Policies for boarding are effective and staff are aware of the appropriate procedures. Links between the boarding and academic staff are strong, enabling pastoral issues to be raised in the daily staff meeting. Regular meetings are held amongst boarding staff, but they are not sufficiently in depth to evaluate performance, and appraisal of staff is at a very early stage of development. Many of the staff have attended boarding-related training courses. Boarding staff give their time willingly, listen to boarders views and assist in their all-round development. The views of the boarders and their parents are taken into account by the school. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaires, a high proportion of the parents and boarders expressed their satisfaction. A small minority of parents raised concerns over the way the school deals with bullying and a very small minority of the boarders felt that an unsatisfactory number of activities are offered on Sundays. The inspection team found no evidence to support these issues.
- 4.23 The school has responded to all of the recommendations regarding storage of medicines, access to telephones, recording of sanctions and the anti-bullying policy since the previous inspection.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is good.
- 5.2 The trustees provide strong and effective oversight of the school in line with its aims and discharge their responsibilities for financial planning and investment in staff, accommodation and resources. Members of the board of trustees have a valuable blend of experience and expertise and provide strong support and guidance. However, they have not carried out their monitoring role of compliance with the regulations with due diligence. The trust has recently recruited a new compliance officer to strengthen their role in governance.
- 5.3 Most of the trustees do not have insight into the day-to-day running of the school or its educational provision. A termly report is provided for them by the headmaster for consideration at trust meetings. These are held in rotation at each of the trust schools.
- 5.4 The trustees do not undertake the annual review of the safeguarding policy and procedures as a full board, but instead delegate this responsibility to the principal. The health and safety policy for all of the trust's schools is overseen by the trust bursar, based in Oxfordshire, and the principal.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.5 The quality of leadership and management is good.
- 5.6 The school's leaders provide effective oversight of pastoral and academic provision in line with the school aims. Since the previous inspection, changes have been made to the management structure. Members of the senior management team have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and ensure that all staff, including those responsible for safeguarding, are trained at the appropriate level. Systems are being developed to improve leadership, management and communication between staff at all levels. Clear vision exists within the leadership team which is shared with the trust. This creates an ethos which is reflected in the good quality of the pupils' education and the excellent standard of their personal development. Ashdown is proud of the family atmosphere that has been created as a result of a culture of mutual trust, respect and consideration for others.
- 5.7 A written report is submitted by the headmaster to the trust each term and the principal is in regular contact with the school. The school development plan, recommended in the previous inspection, has been written and is a helpful tool for setting priorities. Departmental development plans have also been introduced and academic leadership has improved as a result. Heads of department meet regularly and their management role now includes budgets, planning and monitoring. Minutes of meetings are kept and circulated which has improved communication. However, all of these systems are still in their infancy.
- 5.8 Management at all levels demonstrates a good understanding of the strengths and needs of the school. Leadership ensures that the strong relationships between staff and pupils, and highly dedicated teaching, provide well for the pupils' personal and

academic development. An appraisal system has recently been introduced and has begun with the senior leaders, but is not yet fully developed to include all staff or to identify professional development needs for individuals. The amount of training for staff has increased considerably since the previous inspection. Staff are encouraged to visit other schools and to attend courses. Peer observation has been introduced which has promoted professional dialogue about best practice in teaching. Systems have been introduced to monitor planning, teaching and learning but these are not yet fully developed, being still in the early stages of implementation. All staff who work at the school have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau. All staff appointments are made in accordance with the principles of safe recruitment, following all relevant guidance. A single central register of staff appointments is maintained by the trust, administered from its offices in Oxfordshire. Whilst appropriate checks are made, not all of them are entered accurately on the register and the arrangements for storing some documentation at the school and some in Oxfordshire adds complexity to accurate record keeping.

- 5.9 Links with parents, carers and guardians are good. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, the vast majority of parents expressed their satisfaction with the educational provision, the support provided for their children and the quality of communication with the school. A few parents were not satisfied with the amount of information they received about their child's progress. However inspection evidence did not support this view. Two assessment cards indicating effort and attainment grades are sent home each term and two good quality full reports are written each year. A formal parents' evening is organised once a year and regular informal feedback occurs throughout the year.
- 5.10 A small minority of parents were not satisfied with the way the school had handled their concerns but inspection evidence did not support this. Parents are encouraged to contact the school immediately if they have any concerns. Staff follow up all concerns and respond by e-mail, phone or meetings and records are kept, which demonstrates that the school follows its published procedures. The school operates an open-door policy.
- 5.11 All the required information about the school is sent out to parents of current and prospective pupils. The parental portal on the school website is designed to give parents more access to information about the school but the website is not always kept up-to-date. Parents are welcome to attend sports fixtures, music concerts, drama productions and lectures throughout the year. A group of parents help with the library. A newly formed parents' group meets with the headmaster once a term to discuss school issues. Weekend meetings for parents are organised before the term spent in France and informal sporting occasions for families have recently been introduced.
- 5.12 Overall the parents are extremely satisfied with the leadership and management of the school. Parents, pupils and staff speak positively about the development and changes over the last three years.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.