

ASHDOWN HOUSE SCHOOL

Ashdown House, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5JY

DATE OF VISIT

3rd June 2016

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Ashdown House is a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils between the ages of 4 and 13 years. The school is located on the edge of the Ashdown Forest, near Forest Row in East Sussex. A large majority of the pupils are boarders, many of whom are from overseas. The school joined the Cothill Education Trust in 2009. The trust administers seven other schools, one of which is in southern France. The trustees delegate executive responsibilities for all their schools to the principal of the trust. Since the previous inspection a local advisory group has been formed. Its membership comprises the head, principal, trustee with nominated responsibility for the school and three parents and it acts in an advisory capacity.

The number of pupils on the school roll is 136, of whom 105 are boarders. Three children in the reception class are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Thirty-four pupils receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities, none of whom have a statement or education, health and care (EHC) plan. Thirty-nine pupils have English as an additional language, of whom twenty-two receive additional support. The previous inspection took place in September 2015.

PURPOSE OF THE VISIT

This was an announced visit at the request of the Department for Education to check that the school has fully implemented the action plan submitted following the regulatory compliance inspection in September 2015. The focus of the visit was on welfare, health and safety, the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, premises and accommodation, provision of information, the manner in which complaints are handled and the quality of leadership and management.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PUBLICATION

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 (a) and (b) (& 8 (a) and (b) if boarding); (NMS 11); EYFS requirements 3.4-3.7]; provision of information to parents [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32 (1) (c)]

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO PARENTS

The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

The school meets the requirements. The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which is in accordance with the most recent regulatory guidance and provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7(a) and (b); paragraph 8(a) and (b); NMS 11; EYFS requirements 3.4- 3.7]

The school meets the Regulations.

The designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) are trained in inter-agency working at the appropriate level. All staff have recently received training in line with locally agreed procedures, and details of their attendance are recorded thoroughly. The DSL has provided training individually to any absentees. Staff have completed online training in the risks of radicalisation and extremism. New staff receive induction training with the required components and suitable records are kept. In addition, staff new to boarding are shadowed by an experienced senior leader to ensure they have a thorough understanding of their safeguarding and welfare responsibilities. A sample of staff interviewed demonstrated a full awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities, a knowledge of the correct referral pathways and an understanding of how to respond to concerns. They also recognise the threshold between bullying and a safeguarding concern.

The school readily contacts children's services for advice and keeps suitable safeguarding records. Minutes of senior management meetings confirm that safeguarding is a regular agenda item. The DSL appraises the principal, who is the trustees' representative on safeguarding, of any issues in their regular meetings. Minutes of trustees' meetings confirm that pupil welfare, including safeguarding is discussed and that the trustees' annual audit of safeguarding is conducted with sufficient thoroughness.

The school has achieved its objective to implement an appropriate safeguarding policy that accurately reflects current guidance and to ensure that all staff act in accordance with these requirements.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – health and safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 11; NMS 6.1 and 6.2; and for the same reason Part 5, paragraph 25; EYFS requirement 3.54]

The school meets the Regulations.

Records indicate that the school has instigated a rolling programme of maintenance checks on portable electrical equipment. This was confirmed in random checks on a selection of appliances. The health and safety committee, attended by the trust's estates bursar, monitors the completion of this work at its termly meeting. The action plan objective to assure the routine maintenance of electrical equipment is met.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils - admission and attendance registers [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 15; EYFS requirement 3.76]

The school meets the Regulations.

The admission register contains all the required information and presents a clear and accurate record of all the pupils in the school. It is stored for the requisite period. Examination of attendance registers confirms that registration is carried out in accordance with requirements for both the morning and afternoon sessions. Reasons for any absence are entered into registers using appropriate symbols and unexplained absences are promptly followed up. Completion of the registers is regularly monitored. The school has fully implemented the action plan in respect of both admission and attendance registers.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16; NMS 5.1; 6.3 and 10.1; EYFS requirements 3.64 - 3.66]

The school meets the Regulations.

The school has a suitable risk assessment policy which indicates a systematic approach to risk assessment and gives staff clear guidance about how to assess risk. The policy requires risk assessments to be reviewed and signed off by the leadership. Scrutiny of a sample of risk assessments, both for the site and trips, confirms that they conform to the school's policy and use a common framework. They are counter-signed as approved by the leadership. Minutes of health and safety meetings confirm that risk assessments are monitored in termly meetings with the trust's estates bursar present.

The suitability of staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraph 18; paragraph 19.2 and 19.3; NMS 14.1; EYFS requirements 3.9-3.12]

The school meets the Regulations.

The school's recruitment procedures are guided by a recruitment policy implemented in all trust schools. This contains all the required checks for various categories of staff. Scrutiny of the single central register of appointments and a selection of staff files confirms that the school has undertaken all the required checks on staff employed since the recent inspection. The school does not use supply staff but does engage contractors to run activities such as tennis, swimming, chess and ballet. Documentary evidence confirms that all the required checks are made on these staff and that their identification when new in school is correctly checked.

The suitability of staff and proprietors [Part 4, paragraph 21.5(a) and (b); EYFS requirements 3.9-3.12]

The school meets the Regulations.

The single central register of appointments contains all the required entries for staff employed since the previous inspection and confirms that all checks have been carried out in a timely manner. The details of contractors working with the pupils are also correctly entered in the register. The school undertakes some checks such as of identification, qualifications and criminal records and others, such as of the barred list and prohibition from teaching are undertaken by the trust. The register confirms efficient communication between both bodies so that a full record is completed. The register is regularly monitored by the trust's bursar.

Provision of information [Part 6, paragraph 32.1(a)(d)(e); 32.2 (b)(ii); 32.3(g); EYFS requirement 3.73; 3.75 - 3.76]

The school meets the Regulations.

The school has implemented its action plan and provides parents and prospective parents with all the required information by electronic mail and in a prospectus insert. Details of the trust are also clearly provided in the prospectus and on the website. Previous inspection reports are now published on the school's website.

Provision of information [Part 6, paragraph 32.1(b); EYFS requirement 3.73]

The school meets the Regulations.

The school's first aid policy and details of provision for pupils with English as an additional language are made available to parents and parents of prospective pupils on the school's website. All other required information is also published on the website which is kept up to date by administrative staff at the school. Handbooks for parents of pupils in the EYFS and boarding contain both useful and required information. They are subject to annual review to ensure they remain current.

The manner in which complaints are handled [ISSR Part 7, paragraph 33(j)(ii); NMS 18; EYFS requirements 3.74-3.75]

The school meets the Regulations.

The complaints policy published on the school's website is fully compliant with current statutory requirements, including those for the EYFS. It makes provision for a written record of the action taken by the school as the result of a formal complaint, regardless of whether it is upheld. There were no formal complaints in the previous twelve months.

Quality of leadership in and management of schools [Part 8, paragraph 34.1(a),(b), (c); NMS 13.1; 13.4 and 13.5 ; EYFS requirement 3.20]

The school meets the Regulations.

The school has taken steps to ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities have improved their knowledge and understanding of the regulatory requirements. Communication with the trust has been strengthened by regular telephone and electronic mail contact and the principal visits the school

regularly, providing advice and monitoring progress. The leadership attends regular meetings for all the trust schools' senior leaders, where regulatory issues such as the implementation of safeguarding are considered. Senior leaders have developed their skills through undertaking additional training. Communication across the staff has improved through formalising meetings with agendas and minutes which are distributed as necessary. Systems to monitor the implementation of policies are now more robust and all the senior leadership team receive notifications of updates to regulations in order to keep abreast of changes. The school's action plan has been reviewed by senior leaders who can clearly describe the progress made.

The leadership and management of boarding is now more effectively monitored. Boarding meetings take place regularly and include working through the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools to evaluate the school's compliance with them. Senior boarding staff have attended relevant boarding training which has been communicated to other boarding staff. A local advisory group comprising representatives of the school's leadership, the trust and parents, has been formed. This group monitors boarding as part of their function, in accordance with the school's action plan.

REGULATORY ACTION POINTS

The school meets all of the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015 and requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework.