



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

BENENDEN SCHOOL

BOARDING WELFARE

INTERMEDIATE INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Benenden School

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| Full Name of School | Benenden School |
| DfE Number | 886/6002 |
| Registered Charity Number | 307854 |
| Address | Benenden School Cranbrook Road Benenden Cranbrook Kent TN17 4AA |
| Telephone Number | 01580 240592 |
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| Email Address | jmm@benenden.kent.sch.uk |
| Head | Mrs Samantha Price |
| Chair of Governors | Mr Charles Covell |
| Age Range | 11 to 18 |
| Total Number of Pupils | 547 |
| Gender of Pupils | Girls |
| Number of Day Pupils | Total: 0 |
| Number of Boarders | Total: 547 Full: 547 Weekly: 0 |
| Inspection Dates | 09 to 11 February 2016 |

PREFACE

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) Regulations 2014, as amended. This inspection focuses on the school's compliance with 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.

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule* for intermediate inspections, focusing primarily on compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (NMS). The inspection occurs over a period of two and a half continuous days in the 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.

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 in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgement.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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

Inspectors

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Mrs Maureen Bradley | Reporting Inspector |
| Mr Jeremy Hallows | Team Inspector for Boarding (Headmaster, HMC school) |
| Mrs Kate McCarey | Team Inspector for Boarding (Former Assistant Head, HMC school) |
| Mrs Christine Rees | Team Inspector for Boarding (Head of Boarding Compliance, HMC school) |

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Benenden School is a selective girls' boarding school founded in 1923, situated on the outskirts of Benenden village in Kent. It is a registered charity governed by a council of elected members. The school aims to give all pupils a complete education in which they achieve their academic potential, develop their interests and talents, and grow as individuals, whilst respecting those around them and the community in which they live. It seeks to encourage pupils to relish all that school life has to offer so that they leave school as confident, positive young women who are outward looking, courageous and compassionate.
- 1.2 All pupils are full boarders and at the time of the inspection there were 547 pupils aged between 11 and 18 years on roll, including 183 in Years 12 and 13. Pupils are accommodated in ten boarding houses, all on the school campus. There are 6 houses for 11 to 16 year olds and 4 houses for those aged between 16 and 18 years. The majority of boarders are from professional families who mostly come from London and the south east of England. About a fifth of pupils are from overseas, either with parents working abroad or who are foreign nationals. The school has identified 95 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 73 receive learning support. No pupil has an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs. There are 3 pupils receiving support for English as an additional language.
- 1.3 Since the previous inspection in January 2013 a new head has been appointed and there has been an upgrade to facilities in some boarding houses. These include the refurbishment of three boarding houses, an additional six study bedrooms in the provision for Years 12 and 13, and the building of a fully equipped ground floor disability apartment. Within the grounds a set of swings has been added, as well as an all-weather sports pitch and pavilion. Eight houses for staff accommodation are nearing completion.
- 1.4 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 NC equivalence are shown in the following table.

| School name | NC name |
|--------------|---------|
| Fourth Form | Year 7 |
| Upper Fourth | Year 8 |
| Lower Fifth | Year 9 |
| Fifth Form | Year 10 |
| Upper Fifth | Year 11 |
| Six One | Year 12 |
| Six Two | Year 13 |

2. SUMMARY

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

2.1 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015.

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

2.2 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

1. Clarify the principles for boarding to ensure that they fully reflect those promoted by the school for pupils living together in the boarding houses.

(iii) Progress since the previous inspection

2.3 The previous boarding welfare inspection was undertaken by ISI in January 2013. No recommendations were made for boarding in the school.

3. COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS

3.(a) Boarding provision and care

- 3.1 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.2 The school provides a thorough induction for new pupils. They have many opportunities to visit the school before they start and they are provided with a comprehensive range of handbooks explaining boarding procedures. Extra support is provided by both staff and older pupils in their first weeks in school. The pupils have a wide choice of people to whom they say they can confidently turn with any concerns. Contact details are displayed for various helplines outside of school including the Children's Commissioner and the independent listener. [NMS 2]
- 3.3 Effective medical policies are fully implemented. A well-equipped medical centre provides appropriate accommodation and 24-hour care for boarders who are unwell. It is staffed by qualified medical personnel. A school doctor holds a surgery three days a week, and in addition pupils have access to school counsellors and other specialist medical services in the local area. The emotional and mental well-being of pupils is monitored closely and those with an identified medical condition have a suitable welfare plan. Medicines are stored safely and prescribed medication is carefully managed. Pupils who are over the age of 16 are allowed to self-medicate after they have received training from the medical centre and been assessed as competent to do so. The confidentiality of pupils regarding medical conditions is appropriately respected. Most of the house staff have been trained in first aid, and medical and accident records are held centrally and suitably monitored and evaluated. [NMS 3]
- 3.4 The pupils contact their families through their own mobile and internet technology or using the school telephones. The policy for the safe use of the internet is appropriately implemented to ensure pupils' safety. [NMS 4]
- 3.5 The ten boarding houses are well maintained, with suitable heating and lighting. Bedrooms are appropriately furnished and pupils are encouraged to personalise their rooms. The bedding is clean and warm. The common room areas are spacious, bright and comfortable, and are well equipped for both study and leisure. The bathrooms, showers and toilets are sufficient in number, provide appropriate privacy and are easily accessible from the bedrooms. The sleeping accommodation is for the sole use of the pupils during term time and the houses are secure from unauthorised access. The use of CCTV does not intrude on the pupils' privacy. [NMS 5]
- 3.6 An overwhelming majority of the pupils reported a high level of appreciation for the quality and quantity of food provided. Menus offer a wide choice that is healthy and nutritious. In addition to the three main meals, the pupils have access to food in the morning break and at afternoon tea, all served in a bright, clean and spacious central dining room. The kitchens are hygienically maintained and well equipped. All houses have a kitchen where extra snacks and drinks can be prepared in the evening. The school caters to individual dietary needs. [NMS 8]
- 3.7 Laundry for both bedding and personal clothes is efficiently organised. The school shop stocks the school uniform, stationery, toiletries and other essential items. Pupils report that their possessions are safe and can be stored in lockable boxes in their rooms. Valuables and pocket money are kept secure by house matrons. The searching of pupils and their possessions is rare but staff understand the policy and procedures for doing so if required. [NMS 9]

- 3.8 The school provides a wide range of activities throughout the week and at weekends, including trips off site. A very small minority of the pupils who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire reported a lack of satisfaction with activities. This was not confirmed by pupils in discussions, or by the extensive programme offered, with high numbers participating. Pupils have a suitable balance of free time, which is monitored by both academic and pastoral staff, and many opportunities to safely enjoy the school grounds if they wish to seek some moments of quiet relaxation. The school ensures that the pupils have a wide range of media available for them to access news about events in the world. [NMS 10]

3.(b) Arrangements for welfare and safeguarding

- 3.9 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.10 The premises, accommodation and facilities are suitably maintained. Health and safety procedures are managed effectively by two committees, and a clear policy outlines roles of responsibility to ensure that the welfare of pupils is promoted. A termly health and safety report is presented to the full governing council for review. There is a suitable risk assessment policy, and appropriate measures are taken to evaluate and resolve risk in school and on school trips. Boarding houses have appropriate risk assessments that are reviewed regularly. [NMS 6]
- 3.11 Policies and procedures for fire safety are reviewed annually, and all equipment and alarms are inspected and efficiently maintained. An audit of fire safety is completed at least every two years and any recommendations are implemented. Fire drills are conducted in houses every term and include at least one drill during boarding time. They are carefully logged and evaluated. [NMS 7]
- 3.12 Appropriate arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of the pupils. Welfare policies are implemented effectively and reviewed annually by members of the management team and the governing council. Staff are all trained in child protection procedures, including training on how to prevent radicalisation. New staff receive training through their comprehensive induction programme. Any concerns regarding the welfare of pupils are recorded carefully and followed up rigorously in line with school policy. All child protection records are kept secure. [NMS 11]
- 3.13 The school implements a range of pastoral policies and procedures. Good behaviour is promoted and pupils understand the application of rewards and sanctions. A small minority of pupils indicated in response to the pre-inspection questionnaire that sanctions and rewards are not always awarded fairly. In discussion, pupils reported that these are administered fairly in the boarding houses, and the records examined confirmed this. Policies and procedures to prevent, identify and handle incidents of bullying and cyber-bullying are clearly understood by pupils and staff. Records of the rare incidents of bullying show that they have been thoroughly investigated in line with the policy and the outcomes fully documented. The staff understand the procedures for restraining pupils should this be necessary. [NMS 12]
- 3.14 The school operates safer recruitment procedures for the appointment of staff and governors. All the required recruitment checks have been completed for staff before they begin work in the school, and agreements and checks are in place for other adults living on site. The central register of appointments and the staff files are suitably maintained. Visitors do not have unsupervised access to boarding houses. The school does not appoint guardians for the pupils. [NMS 14]

3.(c) Leadership and management of the boarding provision

- 3.15 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.16 A suitable statement of the school's boarding principles and practice is available to parents, staff and pupils. The statement reflects the ethos and aims of the school but is less clear about the principles promoted for pupils living together in the boarding houses. The core values and principles of the school were seen to work in practice by the inspection team. [NMS 1]
- 3.17 In the school's full boarding context, all of the leadership and management demonstrate good skills, are well qualified and experienced, and use their expertise to ensure that boarding standards are met. They actively promote the well-being of boarders. Boarding policies, records and practice are monitored and evaluated for effectiveness by the governing council, and strategic development planning includes improvements to boarding facilities and welfare provision. Communication is efficient amongst all staff to ensure that boarders' welfare and academic standards are closely monitored. All staff are given regular opportunities for training. The overwhelming majority of parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire reported high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of boarding and the information provided for them. They indicated that they are encouraged to be involved in events and other aspects of school life. [NMS 13]
- 3.18 Supervision levels in boarding houses, both during the day and at night, are appropriate and staff duty rotas are known to pupils. Pupils know how to contact staff at night if required. Staff involved in boarding have suitable job descriptions and are sufficiently qualified and experienced for their roles. Through an annual review they identify training to help them in their professional development. Those who supervise pupils on trips and activities are suitably qualified and experienced as necessary. The school conducts roll calls frequently and attendance registers are appropriately maintained and stored. Staff know the procedure to follow should a pupil go missing. The accommodation for staff in boarding houses is suitably separated from the pupils and any visits to staff accommodation are managed appropriately. Any role of spouses or other adult members of staff households within the boarding house is made clear. [NMS 15]
- 3.19 Pupils confirm that discrimination does not occur and that they are treated equally and with respect by staff and their peers. Pupils from overseas, those who need further help with the development of their English and those with SEND have appropriate levels of specialised teaching. The school has an accessibility plan to ensure that no pupil is discriminated against, and makes the necessary adjustments to widen access to the school premises and the curriculum when required. [NMS 16]
- 3.20 There are many committees available for pupils to express their views and concerns. A small minority of pupils reported in responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire that the school does not seek their views or respond to them. Inspection evidence does not support this view. Inspectors found that pupils have a variety of forums to use, including a pupil forum and house councils. In discussions, the pupils confirmed that they have both formal and informal methods of communication and that they have received positive feedback to many of their requests, including additions to kitchen equipment and leisure facilities. [NMS 17]
- 3.21 A suitable complaints procedure is available for all parents and pupils. Records show that formal complaints and concerns are all documented in detail, identify complaints relating to boarding and show when they have been resolved. Formal

complaints are few but records show that they have been handled according to the policy. A very large majority of parents confirmed that the school has handled well any concerns that they have had. [NMS 18]

- 3.22 There is a wide variety of leadership roles on offer for senior pupils, including prefects, known as 'grey jumpers'. Prefects can issue rewards and minor sanctions under supervision of the staff. They are trained for their duties, understand their roles and are respected by the pupils. [NMS 19]
- 3.23 The school does not arrange lodgings for any of its pupils. [NMS 20]