



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

BERKHAMSTED SCHOOL

**BOARDING WELFARE
INTERMEDIATE INSPECTION**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Berkhamsted School

Full Name of School	Berkhamsted School
DfE Number	919/6005
Registered Charity Number	310630
Address	Berkhamsted School 131-133 High Street Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 2DJ England
Telephone Number	01442 358000
Fax Number	01442 358003
Email Address	principal@berkhamstedschool.org
Principal	Mr Richard Backhouse
Chair of Governors	Mr Gavin Laws
Age Range	3 to 19
Total Number of Pupils	1672
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (899 boys; 773 girls)
Numbers by Age	3-11: 523 11-19: 1149
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 1632
Number of Boarders	Total: 40 Full: 29 Weekly: 11
Inspection Dates	09 Feb 2016 to 11 Feb 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 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

Mr Robin Lewis

Reporting Inspector

Miss Tanya Lee

Team Inspector for Boarding (Deputy Head, Pastoral, HMC School)

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Berkhamsted School was founded in 1541 to educate local boys. In 1888 the foundation was extended through the establishment of Berkhamsted School for Girls. The foundation has since developed into a group of six schools, the Berkhamsted Schools Group, which educates boys and girls from five months to 19 years of age, under the overall leadership of the principal. Berkhamsted's overarching mission is to deliver the highest possible standards of pastoral care and education both in and out of the classroom. It is a charitable company, limited by guarantee, and a registered charity. The directors are governors of the school.
- 1.2 The original, historic buildings on the Castle Campus now form the sixth-form centre. The group's central administration, together with the principal's and vice-principals' offices, are situated on Berkhamsted High Street. The various schools' campuses and the playing fields are situated around the town. A satellite, single-sex girls' prep school, Heatherton House, is located in nearby Amersham. In the senior schools, Castle and Kings, boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 16 are taught separately, largely in their own buildings and on separate campuses. Pupils in Years 12 and 13 are taught co-educationally. Pupils in the senior schools may board. There are two boarding houses, Incent's for boys and St John's for girls, which lie midway between the two campuses. Weekly and flexi-boarders are accommodated alongside the full boarders.
- 1.3 Since the previous inspection, a new principal has been appointed, the schools' senior management teams have been augmented, and boarding has undergone changes in management. The sixth-form centre's facilities have been further developed and undergone refurbishment. Much of the boarding accommodation has also been refurbished.
- 1.4 In total, 1672 pupils are enrolled in the senior schools. The boarding community consists of 40 pupils, 25 boys and 15 girls. The vast majority of these pupils are full boarders, in Years 12 and 13. Overall, day pupils reflect the limited ethnic diversity of the immediate locality; parents represent the professional classes of the Chilterns. Boarders, mainly come from the Far East, with many enrolling only for Years 12 and 13. Two boarders have been identified as requiring SEND support which they receive within the weekly timetable. Six boarders receive EAL support from the school.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. SUMMARY

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Further strengthen the information offered to prospective boarders and their parents so that their expectations of boarding are appropriate to the school.
2. Develop consistency between the boarding houses in the pastoral care and discipline of boarders.
3. Standardise the quality of the evening and weekend meals on offer to boarders.

(iii) Progress since the previous inspection

2.3 The previous integrated inspection was undertaken by ISI in September 2012. The recommendations advised the school to ensure an appropriate induction process was given to new boarders; to ensure that there was a range and choice of activities available to boarders outside teaching time and to ensure that there is clear management and leadership in the practice and development of boarding.

2.4 A boarding handbook has been published and is now given to all new boarders. A range of activities is available to boarders, though many choose not to take advantage of these. The vice principal education (and boarding) has assumed the role of head of boarding and the heads of the boarding houses now report to him. Greater depth and clarity has been given to the information available to boarders.

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 Appropriate induction is provided for new boarders and, at interview, boarders acknowledged that this was helpful. They indicated they knew which staff members they could turn to for personal guidance. In addition, the school has dedicated counselling staff, the chaplain and assistant chaplain, house tutors, and an independent listener all of whom are available to pupils. Their contact details are published widely within the school and boarding community, along with that of the Children's Commissioner. [NMS 2]
- 3.3 The school medical centre liaises with the boarding house staff, including the matrons, so that boarders' health is properly monitored and any sickness or injury is managed appropriately. These arrangements are supported by policies and procedures, including, if necessary, suitable accommodation in boarding houses, for first aid, administration of medicines, medical emergencies and self-medication. All these are known and operated by staff. The medical centre provides access for boarders to GP, dental, ophthalmic and other specialist services should they be necessary. All medication is securely stored and proper records are kept, including those for prescription and non-prescription drugs and for those pupils who may be allowed to self-medicate. In the pre-inspection questionnaire a minority of pupils felt that they were not well looked-after should they be sick or injured. Inspection evidence indicates the school gives thorough support to unwell or injured boarders whilst encouraging others not to seek unnecessary medical support. The confidentiality and rights of boarders are respected appropriately. [NMS 3]
- 3.4 In the pre-inspection questionnaire, boarders indicated that they felt able readily to make contact with their friends and families in a variety of ways. Appropriate monitoring and controls are in place to safeguard and promote pupils' welfare as they use electronic communications. [NMS4]
- 3.5 Both boarding houses are warm, well-lit and well-ventilated. Boarders' common rooms, kitchens and bathroom accommodation are spacious and include areas for private study or quiet time. All accommodation is cleaned and maintained to a consistently high standard; any deficiencies are remedied rapidly. Boarders normally sleep in individual rooms although a few, particularly flexi or weekly boarders, may share a bedroom. Bedrooms are well organised and safely managed; suitable risk assessments are in place. Boarders may, and do, personalise their rooms. Toilet and washing facilities, including those for house visitors, are hygienic and modern, appropriately private and readily accessible from bedrooms. A number of senior boarders bedrooms benefit from en-suite bathrooms. The school undertakes to make suitable arrangements should any boarders have temporary or permanently restricted mobility. All furnishings are in good condition and meet pupils' needs. Bedding is clean, linen regularly changed and warm. Adult accommodation, for example, for house staff, is appropriately separated from that for boarders. Boarding houses are secure and protected from access by unauthorised persons. In the pre-inspection questionnaire boarders indicated they felt safe in their houses and that their belongings were secure. Members of the public do not have substantial, unsupervised access to pupils, nor to boarding accommodation. The use of surveillance equipment is not intrusive. [NMS 5]

- 3.6 All boarders' dietary needs are met. Most meals take place in one or other of the schools' dining halls. These accessible, modern facilities are within easy walking distance and provide meals adequate in quantity, quality, choice and variety. A majority of boarders who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire criticised the quality of food. Formal and informal interviews with boarders indicated that, although some of the responses concerned personal preferences, the quality of evening and weekend meals was not consistent. In their boarding houses, and elsewhere around the school, boarders have access to drinking water. Snacks, and the means of hygienically preparing food, are available in the houses at all times. At the time of the inspection there were no boarding pupils with disabilities. [NMS 8]
- 3.7 All laundering, including of bedlinen and of boarders' clothing, is rapid and efficient. Boarders have access to local shops from which they can obtain personal and stationery items. Their personal possessions can be securely stored. Should it be necessary to search a boarder's belongings, clear guidance is given to staff and pupils, which has regard to government advice. [NMS 9]
- 3.8 Boarders have access to information about current events and world news. They are offered an appropriate range of activities outside teaching time, including trips at weekends. A proportion of boarders choose not to avail themselves of these opportunities. Many activities take place in the school's indoor and outdoor recreational facilities, which include safe areas where pupils may choose to be alone. There is adequate time in each day for "free time". Appropriate risk assessments are in place for any activities which may put boarders at risk of harm. There are no pupils on whom especially onerous demands are made. [NMS 10]

3.(b) Arrangements for welfare and safeguarding

- 3.9 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.10 The school's health and safety policy complies with all relevant health and safety laws. The premises, accommodation and facilities available to all pupils, including boarders, and staff are maintained so that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of the whole community are ensured. This policy is supported by appropriate risk assessments, structured according to the school's policy, so that risks are identified and appropriately minimised. [NMS6]
- 3.11 The school complies with the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005 and carries out regular and sufficiently frequent fire drills, at least termly in boarding time. [NMS 7]
- 3.12 Safeguarding and child protection arrangements comply with official guidance and incorporate liaison with local agencies. They are made available to staff and pupils and these groups understand the contents. New staff receive appropriate safeguarding training. In addition, all staff are given regular reminders and updates on policies and procedures. Governors annually review safeguarding and are aware of their corporate safeguarding responsibilities. [NMS 11]
- 3.13 The school has appropriate policies to promote good behaviour including measures to combat bullying and cyberbullying. These detail the schools' rules, sanctions and the arrangements for restraint and searching of property, should these be necessary. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a majority of pupils felt that boarding staff treated them unfairly, commenting particularly on the sanctions applied within and between the houses. Inspection evidence indicated that although the school's overarching policies gave helpful guidance there were, from time to time, inequalities

in the allocation and fairness of the houses' arrangements and sanctions. Nevertheless, the school's thorough records itemise the robust and fair approach taken towards any bullying or poor behaviour. [NMS 12]

- 3.14 Safe recruitment procedures meet regulatory requirements. The human resources department makes all necessary checks, including those required from the disclosure and barring service (DBS). These are recorded on the single central register and backed up in each staff member's file. Those over 16 who live on the same premises as boarders, but who are not employed by the school, have an enhanced DBS certificate and a contract which specifies the terms of their accommodation. It also gives guidance on the residents' relationships with pupils and visitors, including the requirement to notify senior staff should they be charged with or convicted of an offence. Visitors to the boarding houses are supervised so that they cannot gain substantial unsupervised access either to pupils or their accommodation. The school does not arrange the appointment of guardians. [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 The school publishes a statement of boarding principles and practice in the handbook given to each boarder. Clear information is provided to prospective boarders and their parents. Despite this, on their arrival, not all boarders appear fully aware of the nature, profile and size of the boarding community at Berkhamsted. [NMS 1]
- 3.17 Governors monitor the effectiveness of the management, leadership and delivery of boarding together with the school's welfare provision, through its regular meetings. Appropriate action is taken as necessary and the results monitored. The management and leadership of boarding practice is clearly defined, in line with the recommendation from the previous report. Each boarder, in addition to membership of their boarding house, is a member of a day house. The pastoral duality of this arrangement ensures there are effective links between academic and residential staff in the care of boarders. The school's leadership and management have appropriate skills and knowledge, so that they can consistently fulfil their responsibilities and ensure that national minimum standards are met. Senior leaders are also active, together with the governors, in promoting boarders' well-being. They ensure the school maintains the required policies and records, monitoring them as required, and taking action to improve the outcomes for pupils. [NMS 13]
- 3.18 All boarding staff have appropriate job descriptions and adequate experience and training. Opportunities to gain extra qualifications and undertake more training are readily available; staff take full advantage of this provision. New appointees receive suitable induction training and have regular professional reviews. The two boarding houses are fully staffed, and pupils are never in boarding houses without an adult presence. Within the houses, duty times are appropriately rostered to ensure that boarders have suitable supervision during their time in the house and during their activities. Staff know the boarders' whereabouts, or where to find them, at all times. All adults working with boarders know and can implement the school's procedures with regard to missing pupils. They know how to work with police should this be necessary. Each night at least one adult member of staff sleeps in each boarding house, is responsible for the boarders and can be contacted easily. All staff have

their own dedicated accommodation within the boarding house suitably separated from the pupils. Boarders rarely enter staff accommodation and this, in groups, is for special occasions only. Spouses and other adult members of staff households have their roles made clear. [NMS 15]

- 3.19 The school pays attention to the Equality Act 2010 so that no boarder, of whatever background, or ability receives unequal care. The school's procedures ensure that the individual needs of pupils are met. [NMS 16]
- 3.20 Boarders contribute readily and freely to the boarding arrangements. They may raise concerns or make complaints, for example through questionnaires, house meetings or informal conversations, and their opinions are given due weight. They are not penalised for raising a concern or making a complaint. [NMS 17]
- 3.21 The school's complaints policy complies with the regulations and any complaints, together with any action taken, are scrupulously recorded. [NMS 18]
- 3.22 The prefects of boarding are the heads and deputy heads of houses and they undertake appropriate duties having undergone a suitable induction. Staff supervision ensures they do not abuse their role. [NMS 19]
- 3.23 The school does not arrange lodgings for pupils. [NMS 10]