



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

BISHOP'S STORTFORD COLLEGE

MARCH 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Bishop's Stortford College			
DfE number	919/6007			
Registered charity number	311057			
Address	Bishop's Stortford College Maze Green Road Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 2PJ			
Telephone number	01279 838575			
Email address	generalenquiry@bishopsstortfordcollege.org			
Headmaster	Mr Jeremy Gladwin			
Chair of governors	Dr Philip Hargrave			
Age range	13to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	590			
	Boys	322	Girls	268
	Day pupils	515	Boarders	75
	Seniors	337	Sixth Form	253
Inspection dates	1 to 2 March 2017			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

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

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

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

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

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

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

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

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

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

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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

Inspectors

Mrs Colette Culligan	Reporting inspector
Mr Rodney Harris	Team inspector (Director of studies, HMC school)
Mr David Lauder	Team inspector (Headmaster, Society of Heads school)
Ms Heather McKissack	Team inspector (Senior teacher, HMC school)
Mr Alastair Reid	Team inspector (Headmaster, ISA and IAPS school)
Mr Nick Brown	Team inspector for boarding (Deputy head, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Established in 1868 as the Non-conformist Grammar School for boys, Bishop's Stortford College senior school is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged between 13 and 18 years. The College's pre-preparatory and preparatory schools were inspected separately and are the focus of separate reports. The school is a registered charity, governed by the charity's directors, and maintains its Christian ethos.
- 1.2 All pupils are members of one of the nine school houses. School House and Robert Pearce House accommodate senior boys, and girl boarders live in Young House. Pupils may board on a full, weekly or occasional basis. A second boarding house for girls and a replacement for Robert Pearce house are under construction, as are replacements for two of the day houses. All are due to open in September 2017.
- 1.3 Since the previous full ISI inspection in 2011, a new house for day girls has opened, subject provision in the curriculum has been expanded, and the programme of enrichment activities has been extended. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has been considerably enhanced.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school aims to provide an environment of discovery and participation within which its pupils can grow academically, morally, spiritually, athletically and creatively. Its intention is that pupils will become fulfilled, skilful and happy individuals who are equipped to contribute to society in whatever pathway they choose for their future lives.

About the pupils

- 1.5 Pupils come from a range of professional or military families, the majority living within Hertfordshire or Essex. Most of the boarders attend on either a weekly or occasional basis. Of the 40 overseas pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL), 11 receive specialist teaching from the learning support department.
- 1.6 Nationally standardised data provided by the school indicates that the ability of the pupils in Years 9 to 11 is above average and that of pupils in the sixth form broadly average. The school has identified 129 pupils as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND); 47 of these receive specialist help from the school, mostly for dyslexia or medical disabilities. One pupil has a statement of special educational need.
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
4 th form	Year 9
Lower 5 th form	Year 10
Upper 5 th form	Year 11
Lower 6 th form	Year 12

Upper 6 th form	Year 13
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Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.8 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was a standard inspection in March 2011. The recommendation from that inspection was:
- Ensure that all teachers act upon awareness of pupils' needs and aspire to emulate best practice in meeting them, to enable consistently high standards of teaching.
- 1.9 The school has successfully met the recommendation of the previous inspection.
- 1.10 The recommendation of the intermediate boarding inspection in April 2013 was:
- Ensure that formal meetings of all the boarding staff in each house are held at regular intervals.
- 1.11 The school has successfully met the recommendation of the previous inspection.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils make very good progress over time, supported by rigorous teaching and careful monitoring.
- They have excellent attitudes towards their learning and highly developed study skills.
- Their intellectual curiosity and appetite for knowledge are stimulated by their teachers' passion for their subject and high expectations of pupils.
- The school is highly successful in creating an ethic of hard work and enthusiastic participation.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils have high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem combined with a courteous and friendly demeanour.
- They are resilient and determined to make the most of their abilities and potential.
- Pupils show a strong awareness of the importance of tolerance and respect for others.
- Younger pupils occasionally lack the understanding shown by their seniors of their responsibility to take action when observing inappropriate behaviour.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement:

- Take steps to enable younger pupils to recognise and understand their responsibilities in promoting what the school describes as a 'telling' community.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills develop rapidly across the full range of subjects studied. This is due to a classroom atmosphere of focused learning promoted by the school and an overall ethos of lively participation in all that the school offers. Pupils are excellent communicators, contributing eagerly to discussions, listening closely to others and writing with fluent control of language and vocabulary. Written work from older pupils shows sophisticated, even elegant, control of language. They apply their very good mathematical and scientific understanding confidently across the curriculum, from the interpretation of graphs and statistics in humanities subjects to the calibration of lathes in design technology (DT). Their creativity is evident and reaches outstanding standards in their music making and the art work and photography they produce, some in response to projects in other subjects such as in a history project on Native Americans. Their photography also demonstrates their confidence in using information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum, for example in a competition asking pupils to respond in poetry to a photographic image they have created. Questionnaire responses both from parents and pupils indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the progress and academic attainment of pupils. Inspection evidence supports this positive view.
- 3.3 The following analysis uses the national data for 2013 to 2015, the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are available. Results at GCSE have been above the national average for maintained schools, and were well above in 2015. Results at A level have been well above the national average. Examination performance in 2016 indicates that similar standards have been achieved. The great majority of pupils leaving at the end of Year 13 go on to university, their choices covering a wide range of competitive courses. There is no significant difference in the progress of boys and girls or ability groups, all pupils attaining public examination results at least in line with, and often well above, their predicted grades. Their progress is supported by a thorough system of academic monitoring which pupils say they find helpful.
- 3.4 Based on these examination results and standardised measures of progress which are available, pupils make good progress at GCSE and excellent progress at A level, in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. Inspection evidence gained from lesson observation, pupils' written work and interviews with them indicates that pupils, including those with SEND or EAL, make good progress over time, and the more able make excellent progress. Pupils grow adept in skills such as essay structuring and analysis thanks to carefully structured teaching in Years 9 to 11 which offers extra support or extra challenge as appropriate. This was seen in a lesson looking at a piece of literature where one group was set to consider the use of location and another the overall structure, the latter with minimal guidance. The high rate of progress of the more able pupils is stimulated by teaching which maintains a rapid pace and a high degree of challenge. The success gained by less able pupils derives in part from effective planning which allows more time for further reinforcement of basic concepts and ideas. By the time they reach the sixth form, pupils have excellent learning skills and their progress is consistently rapid.
- 3.5 Pupils have an excellent attitude to their learning. Incidents of distracting or time wasting behaviour in class are rare, reflecting the success of senior leadership's drive to create a culture of achievement. Pupils have a business-like approach to lessons; they expect to work hard and enjoy the challenges of doing so. They take pride in their work; written work is well presented and folders are meticulously well organised. They are stimulated by their teachers' evident

passion for their specialist subjects and their consistently high expectations of pupils. In a biology lesson, pupils were keen to research further information for themselves to support their understanding of a new topic. Pupils responded swiftly to exhortations to extend their vocabulary by finding a better word in modern languages oral practice. They show genuine interest and an appetite for learning, responding with intellectual curiosity when a topic moves beyond examination requirements and making comments such as how intrigued they are by the subject matter. The enthusiasm generated by a new topic in a history lessons, carefully channelled into productive discussion by skilful teaching, was evident; pupils responded to provocative questioning in a music lesson on composition with independent thought and creativity. As they mature, pupils show increasing skill in analysing and synthesising information, for example in debating the impact of deforestation. Printed information given in advance is carefully highlighted and annotated by pupils, so that information is assimilated before coming to class and the focus moves immediately to discussion. Pupils confirm that they benefit greatly from the approachability and supportiveness of their teachers and boarders appreciate the easy availability of help with homework tasks from their tutors when on duty in the houses. The high-order skills generated by rigorous teaching prepare pupils very well for the challenges of independent research projects and for the next stage of their education.

- 3.6 Pupils achieve well in activities beyond the classroom. They achieve success at a high level in academic challenges such as the mathematics challenge and science Olympiads. Teams have twice reached the finals of an international Space Design competition organised by NASA. Art students have had work selected for display in the Royal Academy's on-line art exhibition. More than half of the pupils learn a musical instrument and achieve well in grade examinations up to Diploma level. Individuals have been awarded places in the National Youth Orchestra and others in the National Youth Theatre. School teams have regularly been East Anglian finalists in an inter-schools Brains Trust competition and are local champions in public speaking competitions. Their minds are further opened and their intellectual curiosity stimulated by school events such as the lecture programme and the annual 'Festival of Literature' when well-known authors visit to speak and are interviewed by pupils.
- 3.7 Enthusiastic voluntary involvement in sport results in high levels of success. Girls' and boys' hockey teams are under-14 and under-16 county champions and have been under-14 national finalists. Several pupils play at county level in a range of sports, including rugby, and some have gone on to national honours. Several boys are in the rugby academy or the rugby development pathway of a London premiership team. More than half of the pupils achieve the bronze level of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and several continue with the silver and gold levels, some completing the latter while still at school. The school's excellent facilities and its overall culture of participation and of striving to do one's best are significant factors contributing to pupils' successes in the academic and wider spheres.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils grow steadily in self-confidence and independence, well supported by the curriculum and teaching. Some younger pupils were overheard making frustrated comments in an examination-oriented lesson at not being given rote answers to write in response to a question but instead being told to form their own responses. On the other hand, sixth-form students told inspectors how the school's refusal at GCSE level to spoon-feed them, while ensuring they had a thorough grounding in analytical and study skills, had paid dividends as they embarked on their A-level studies. Such comments show the way in which pupils' understanding of themselves and of how to improve their work and performance develops over time. Their enthusiasm for learning and their strong work ethic illustrate the high level of success the pupils are achieving in becoming independent, confident and well-prepared for their future lives.
- 4.3 Relationships in the classrooms and in the boarding houses are relaxed, friendly and cooperative. Pupils are very supportive of each other, helping and praising each other constructively. They work together extremely well in class, whether independently, in pairs or small group. They discuss animatedly and keep their focus on the task in hand. Pupils have a very good understanding of themselves and of their academic progress. They were virtually unanimous in their positive response to the questionnaire asking whether they know how well they are doing, although a small number said that they do not find the marking of their work useful. Inspectors found that self-assessment sheets following essay work, marking with clear target setting and helpful comments from teachers ensure that pupils are helped to improve their work. In discussion pupils said that they quickly learn to be self-disciplined in their approach to work. They persevere and show resilience when faced with difficulties or challenges, such as those encountered in expeditions for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.
- 4.4 Pupils develop the confidence to make up their own minds and take decisions for themselves, seen for example in a lesson exploring the best form of treatment for infertility or selecting the subject matter and medium to use in art. They are very aware that their chances of achieving their future ambitions, academic or sporting, depend on their own attitude and the decisions they make for example in choosing combination of subjects or in organising their leisure time. They speak highly of the support offered by their house staff, their tutors and the higher education and careers department. Younger pupils also appreciate the example and informal advice of senior pupils, in academic and personal terms. This peer support is facilitated by the vertical organisation of the house system and the school's mentoring programme.
- 4.5 As they move through the school, pupils show maturity in seizing the increasing opportunities to take responsibility and leadership in a variety of ways, many of which contribute directly to the good of the whole school community. Younger pupils look up to their seniors, saying that they want to be like them when they are older. In their turn, the older pupils are very conscious of their position as role models and live up to their responsibilities conscientiously. Senior boarders help in the running of evening routines and act as 'buddies' to new arrivals. Overseas boarders spoke appreciatively of how swiftly they were helped by their peers to settle into the school.
- 4.6 Senior members of each house, day and boarding alike, show excellent leadership in organising house events, including the lively programmes of fund-raising activities for the charities of the pupils' choices. These have included national charities for issues such as men's mental health and the school's support of a school in Malawi, and also a few relating to the local area. Pupils

working on the service element of their Duke of Edinburgh's Award show responsibility in undertaking such activities as working in charity shops. Their social awareness is well-developed and they enjoy other community outreach activities such as hosting local elderly people at a Christmas party and involvement in the community service programme of a local church. Pupils take the lead in proposing actions or societies in school focused on issues that are important to them. Examples include their active involvement in a recently established Amnesty International group, drawing on the experiences of staff in working with refugees. A pupil welfare group has worked with senior staff on improving access for non-elite sports players to the gym and on the challenge of working with the catering department in responding to requests for healthy food options within budgetary constraints. These pupil-led initiatives demonstrate their social awareness and active contributions to developing their school community.

- 4.7 Pupils have a good awareness of the non-material dimension of human existence. They enjoy the atmosphere of the chaplaincy room set aside for quiet reflection when they are involved in mindfulness sessions; however, few pupils spoke of using this calm and reflective space otherwise. Moments of reflection on wider philosophical or ethical issues in lessons are embraced by pupils. For example, there was a palpable sense of astonishment when pupils were faced in physics with the incomprehensible notion of absolute zero; in a psychology lesson pupils pondered soberly on the dilemmas posed by experimentation on animals and humans. Pupils' awareness of the non-material is most evident in their appreciation of aesthetic beauty, their art work and music making. They sang tunefully in the assembly observed during the inspection and their genuine appreciation of their peers' musical performances was obvious.
- 4.8 Pupils are courteous and welcoming to visitors. They understand and appreciate the importance of the school's rules in helping to create a civilised and harmonious learning community. As they mature, pupils develop a strong internalised awareness of right and wrong. In discussions, it was clear that pupils fully understand that bullying is wrong and they said that occurrences are rare. Their moral development is supported by the school's direct encouragement of them to see themselves as part of a 'telling school' in which all have the responsibility to speak out. Younger pupils find the challenge of doing so difficult, however, and are reluctant to take actions that they fear will make them unpopular with others. By the time they reach the sixth form, such diffidence has disappeared and pupils confidently go to staff to express concerns about unpleasant or unacceptable behaviour.
- 4.9 Pupils' sense of justice and fairness extends to a warm acceptance of diversity and a mind-set that instinctively promotes equality. In a discussion on poetry that considered the tensions for migrants between wishing to integrate into Britain and yet retain their own culture, pupils were incensed at a suggestion that immigrants should simply abandon their original culture and language. Pupils showed a similarly empathic understanding and an awareness of the ethical dilemmas of settlement in a history lesson on the treatment of Native Americans. The pupil-led International Committee works hard to ensure that the needs and cultural contributions of overseas pupils are recognised by the school. In their turn, overseas pupils grow in an understanding of the cultural and behavioural norms of Britain, helped by the learning support department. A pupil-led assembly helped the rest of the school to understand the challenges facing those with physical disabilities to be overcome as they strive to achieve their sporting ambitions. The work of the 'Rainbow project' group of pupils is highly successful in helping to remove stereotypical attitudes to gender and to create different role models for pupils as they mature. While a minority of pupils said in the questionnaire that they thought staff did not always present unbiased political views, there was no evidence to support this. Pupils told inspectors that they consider the most important rule of behaviour to be respecting

others and they know the fundamental importance of tolerance and democracy in the political as well as the personal sphere. This understanding has been actively enhanced by ensuring that a debate on the issue of Britain leaving the European Union presented both sides of the argument evenly.

- 4.10 Pupils are strongly aware of the importance of exercise in maintaining a sense of control in their lives, so that academic pressures are relieved. They understand the importance of a healthy diet and the need to make appropriate choices in leading a balanced and healthy lifestyle. In this, they are supported by helpful and relevant PSHE sessions focused on mindfulness, and by the guidance from staff in organising themselves and managing their time effectively. Such awareness and their own common sense helps them to leave the school as fulfilled, confident and well-balanced individuals ready to embark on the challenges of the future and to contribute to society. Questionnaire responses from parents and pupils show very high satisfaction with the school's provision of a safe and healthy environment for pupils.