



Material Change Inspection Report

Rochester Independent College

June 2024

School's details

School name	Rochester Independent College			
DfE number	887/6004			
Address	Rochester Independent College 254 St Margaret's Banks Rochester Kent ME1 1HY			
Telephone number	01634 828115			
Email address	admissions@rochester-college.org.uk			
Principal	Mr Alistair Brownlow			
Chair of proprietors	Mr Aatif Hassan			
Proprietor	Dukes Education Limited			
Age range	11 to 21			
Number of pupils on roll	378			
	Day pupils	235	Boarders	143
	Seniors	181	Sixth Form	197
Date of inspection	28 June 2024			

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 Rochester Independent College is a co-educational independent day and boarding school. It is situated in the centre of Rochester in Kent. The school is owned by Dukes Education Limited who provide a board of governors. The school is organised into: the lower school for pupils aged eleven to sixteen; and the sixth form. There are two main boarding houses, one each for male and female pupils, with additional accommodation in residential houses which form part of the school campus. The school has 144 pupils who require support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 42 have an education, health and care plan. There are 116 pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). The school's previous inspection was a regulatory compliance inspection in January 2023.

Purpose of the inspection

- 1.2 This was an announced material change inspection at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to assess the school's proposal to increase its capacity from 380 to 425 pupils. The additional pupils will primarily be boarders who will be accommodated in a new purpose-built boarding house. The inspection focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs), and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding 2022.

Regulations which were the focus of the inspection	Team judgements
Part 3, paragraphs 7 (safeguarding) and 8 (safeguarding of boarders); NMS 8	Met
Part 3, paragraph 11 (health and safety); NMS 9	Met
Part 3, paragraph 12 (fire safety); NMS 10	Met
Part 3, paragraph 13 (first aid); NMS 7	Met
Part 3, paragraph 14 (supervision); NMS 20	Met
Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment); NMS 9	Met
Part 4, paragraphs 18–21 (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors); NMS 19	Met
Part 5, paragraphs 23 - 29 (premises and accommodation); NMS 4 and 7	Met
Part 5, paragraph 30 (boarding accommodation); NMS 4	Met
NMS 5 (boarders' possessions)	Met
NMS 6 (provision and preparation of food and drinks)	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met

Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management); NMS 2	Met
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2. Inspection findings

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding and safeguarding of boarders [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 8]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.1 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.2 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.3 The school meets the standards.
- 2.4 Senior leaders ensure effective implementation of the school's safeguarding procedures. School leaders have embedded a culture of collective responsibility with regard to safeguarding. The wellbeing and safety of pupils is prioritised. In discussion staff demonstrated a clear understanding that everyone has a role to play in ensuring that pupil wellbeing is actively promoted. The school's safeguarding team are all trained in line with statutory requirements. The school plans to add an additional member of staff to the safeguarding team to prepare for the increase in boarders. This increase in staffing, combined with the current arrangements, are likely to meet the requirements following the proposed increase in pupil numbers.
- 2.5 Discussion with pupils confirmed that they have many trusted adults in the school community to whom they can turn to raise concerns and seek support. Pupils feel that staff will always listen to them, provide a response, and will take appropriate action. Pupils can also share their concerns anonymously. Prompt action by staff, when needed, is confirmed by the school's safeguarding records. Pupils are well prepared to keep themselves safe online and when they are outside the school community. Senior leaders and governors ensure effective monitoring of the use of technology in the school.
- 2.6 Staff have a comprehensive understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures. They know the pupils well and are able to identify pupils in need of support. They know how to report concerns, including any that may involve child-on-child abuse, both internally and if needed directly to external agencies. Staff have a detailed knowledge of the school's code of conduct and whistleblowing policy. They recognise their responsibility in sharing any concerns about individuals or any apparent weaknesses in school policy with school leaders or, if needed, governors. Detailed training records show that staff receive regular safeguarding training in line with local requirements.
- 2.7 Safeguarding leaders maintain suitable safeguarding records. The log of concerns shows that the school acts promptly and appropriately in any safeguarding incidents that arise. The safeguarding team are proactive in identifying pupils' needs and they liaise appropriately with children's services in a timely manner. They communicate effectively with parents and put in place appropriate support for individual pupils, including detailed risk assessments if required.
- 2.8 Suitable arrangements are in place to handle any allegations or concerns raised about staff. Appropriate records of allegations received, including low-level concerns, show that the schools seek immediate advice from the local authority designated safeguarding officer (LADO). Records show that the school works effectively with external agencies, and acts appropriately on any advice received from the LADO.
- 2.9 Governors are trained appropriately in safeguarding and maintain effective oversight of the school's implementation of the safeguarding policy. They review the policy annually and receive weekly reports

from the safeguarding team. Governors discuss and review safeguarding matters at all of their meetings. The designated safeguarding governor visits the school regularly, to meet with safeguarding leaders. They discuss any relevant concerns and view the safeguarding records.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – health and safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 11; NMS 9]

- 2.10 The school meets the standards.
- 2.11 The school has a suitable health and safety policy which is implemented effectively. Record keeping shows that the school ensures that all health and safety matters are dealt with promptly. In discussion, staff confirmed that they are able to raise any concerns easily and that any necessary remedial action is taken promptly. A detailed site maintenance plan is implemented effectively. This covers regular checks and servicing of equipment. A comprehensive programme of staff training is in place. All accidents and near misses are recorded appropriately. A suitable contingency plan is in place for any major incident that might occur on site or during an educational visit. The school's health and safety committee have effective oversight of all matters pertaining to health and safety across the school, ensuring that as far as possible the school provides a safe environment in which pupils, including boarders, can live and work. Governors receive regular reports and visit regularly to monitor health and safety across the school. The arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – fire safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 12; NMS 10]

- 2.12 The school meets the standards.
- 2.13 There is a suitable fire prevention strategy and appropriate fire risk assessments. The school has appropriate action plans to address the issues raised in the most recent assessments. These included all boarding houses and were undertaken by a suitably qualified person. The remedial work required has been completed in a timely manner. The school's new boarding accommodation has a detailed and suitable fire strategy in place which will be used to inform the fire risk assessment prior to the opening of the building. Fire procedures are understood by staff and pupils, who are regularly provided with suitable training. Record keeping shows that fire drills take place regularly, including in boarding time. Fire equipment, alarms, emergency lighting, evacuation routes and appropriate signage are serviced and maintained appropriately. The arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – first aid [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 13; NMS 7]

- 2.14 The school meets the standards.
- 2.15 The school has appropriate policies and procedures in place for first aid and the administering of medicines. The policies are implemented effectively to ensure that relevant care is provided for pupils, including boarders, who are sick or injured. Records show that the administering of medicines is co-ordinated effectively with boarding house staff. There is appropriately locked storage for medicines in the medical centre and in boarding houses. Suitable numbers of staff, including those involved in boarding, are trained in first aid and administering medicines. The school has suitable plans to increase the staffing levels in the medical centre in preparation for an increase in pupil numbers. The arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – supervision of pupils [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 14; NMS 20]

- 2.16 The school meets the standards.
- 2.17 Pupils, including boarders, are supervised effectively by an appropriate number of suitably qualified and trained staff. Detailed supervision rotas for staff are appropriate for the nature of the school site and the activities involved. Boarding staff use an effective online software application to monitor the whereabouts of boarders. All staff involved in boarding have suitable job descriptions. They ensure boarders are supervised effectively in their houses and know how to contact a member of staff overnight. Staff know how to implement the school's policy for a missing pupil, including for any boarder. The arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16; NMS 9]

- 2.18 The school meets the standards.
- 2.19 The school implements a suitable risk assessment policy effectively. Staff are trained thoroughly to identify and manage risk. Regularly reviewed risk assessments are in place for all aspects of school life including educational visits, boarding, teaching facilities and outdoor areas. The new building, which will accommodate additional boarders and a new creative arts facility, has been risk assessed effectively. Any risks associated with the planned increase in pupil numbers across the school have also been suitably assessed with appropriate mitigations put in place. There are specific and effective welfare plans in place for vulnerable pupils. These plans are managed by the safeguarding team. The arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18–21; NMS 19]

- 2.20 The school meets the standards.
- 2.21 The school implements its recruitment policy effectively. The required pre-appointment checks on staff, governors, contractors and members of boarding staff households who are over 16 are carried out appropriately. The dates of each check are recorded accurately in the single central register. Staff files include the evidence needed to confirm that the relevant checks have been made. The arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

Premises and accommodation – toilets and washing and changing facilities; medical facilities; maintenance; acoustics; lighting; water supply and outdoor space [ISSR Part 5, paragraphs 23-29; NMS 4 and 7]

- 2.22 The school meets the standards.
- 2.23 The school has suitable provision for toilet and washing facilities across the campus, including in boarding houses. There are separate toilets for staff, male, female and gender-neutral pupils, as well as suitably designated disabled toilets. The toilet and washing facilities provide suitable privacy for pupils. Suitable shower facilities are available to boarders in their boarding houses. Sport and physical education take place offsite at externally hired facilities which provide showers and toilets. The arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

- 2.24 The school's suitably equipped medical centre provides appropriate accommodation for medical examination, treatment of injuries and care of pupils who are unwell. Boarders who are unwell can also be appropriately looked after in their boarding house. All accommodation for the care of pupils who are ill has close access to toilets and washing facilities. The medical arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.
- 2.25 The school's campus and buildings are well maintained. A detailed five-year plan for maintenance incorporates all of the boarding houses. This is implemented effectively. Any required repair work is carried out in a timely manner. Regular monitoring of the campus enables the maintenance team to be proactive in ensuring that the school site provides a safe environment for pupils. Lighting, both internally and externally, as well as acoustic levels across the school's buildings and boarding houses are appropriate.
- 2.26 There is a suitable, and clearly labelled, supply of drinking water across the school site including in boarding houses. There are numerous drinking fountains which are separate from toilet facilities. The flow of cold water to washing facilities is appropriate and the temperature of hot water in showers and washbasins is regularly monitored.
- 2.27 The school has an extensive garden and artificial sports surface which are suitable for pupils' leisure time. The new boarding house will have its own outdoor space which boarders will be able to use for socialising. The arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

Premises and accommodation – boarding facilities [ISSR Part 5, paragraph 30; NMS 4]

- 2.28 The school meets the standards.
- 2.29 The school's separate boarding houses for male and female pupils provide good quality sleeping accommodation in mostly single rooms. The accommodation gives boarders suitable privacy. Boarders can personalise their individual areas if they so wish. Many of the single rooms have ensuite facilities and where this is not the case, two rooms will share a good quality bathroom. When completed, the new boarding accommodation will provide exclusively single ensuite rooms.
- 2.30 Boarders' living accommodation is well furnished, providing suitable areas for socialising and playing indoor games. Staff accommodation is appropriately separate from that of boarders. The entrance to boarding houses is electronically secure, ensuring that unauthorised people cannot access the building. All boarding entrances are monitored by CCTV cameras. The new boarding house will provide suitable living areas for boarders to socialise.
- 2.31 The boarding arrangements in place, with the addition of the new boarding house, are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

Boarders' possessions [NMS 5]

- 2.32 The school meets the standard.
- 2.33 The school makes appropriate laundry provision for boarders' personal clothing and bedding, which is changed once a week. All boarders have their own lockable cupboard for personal possessions. They can also leave valuable items in lockable storage in the care of houseparents. The arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers, including boarders.

Provision and preparation of food and drinks [NMS 6]

2.34 The school meets the standard.

2.35 Boarders, including those with special dietary requirements, are provided with good quality, nutritional meals through the school's central catering facility. Breakfast, lunch and evening meals all give boarders a range of menu choices. The central dining rooms and kitchen are well maintained, and there is additional outdoor sitting for pupils to take lunch in the garden. Boarders can also use appropriately equipped house kitchens to prepare their own food and additional snacks. The catering arrangements in place are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the planned increase in pupil numbers.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

2.36 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.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 2]

2.37 The school meets the standards.

2.38 School leaders have the appropriate skills and knowledge to ensure that all the standards are consistently met. They prioritise the welfare of pupils as typified by their approach to the mitigation of risk and prioritisation of safeguarding across the school. Leaders have planned effectively so that the measures in place to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers, including the new boarding house, are likely to ensure that the wellbeing of pupils continues to be actively promoted.

3. Recommendation with regard to material change inspection

Recommendation

- 3.1 It is recommended that the school's request to increase its numbers from 380 to 425 be approved as planning for the proposed increase across the school is appropriate.

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 The inspector held discussions with the principal, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with a group of governors. He visited different areas of the school, including the new boarding and teaching accommodation, and talked with groups of pupils. He scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.