



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

DEAN CLOSE PREPARATORY SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Dean Close Preparatory School

The pre-preparatory school and senior school were inspected at the same time and separate reports published.

Full Name of School	Dean Close Preparatory School		
DfE Number	916/6034		
Registered Charity Number	1086829		
Address	Dean Close Preparatory School Lansdown Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL51 6QS		
Telephone Number	01242 512217		
Fax Number	01242 258005		
Email Address	dcpsoffice@deanclose.org.uk		
Headmaster	Rev'd Leonard Browne		
Chairman of Trustees	Mrs Patricia Napier		
Age Range	7 to 13		
Total Number of Pupils	260		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (154 boys; 106 girls)		
Numbers by Age	7-11:	139	11-13: 121
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	185	
Number of Boarders	Total:	75	
	Full:	61	Day boarding: 14
Inspection dates	20 Sep 2011 to 21 Sep 2011		
	17 Oct 2011 to 19 Oct 2011		

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in October 2005.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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

The inspection of boarding was not carried out in conjunction with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills, and the report does not contain specific judgements on 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 and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report refers to an inspection in November 2008 and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will 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.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Dean Close Preparatory School is one of three co-educational schools named after Francis Close, former Rector of Cheltenham and Dean of Carlisle. The original school was founded in 1886. The schools are set in 50 acres of parkland on the outskirts of Cheltenham. The preparatory school has been a separate entity since the 1930s, and currently has 260 pupils aged from 7 to 13, including 75 boarders. The other schools provide for younger, pre-preparatory pupils and for older pupils of secondary school age.
- 1.2 The school's principal aim is that in seeking to offer an all-round education it should be a place where people feel safe, respected, secure and free to learn. The school views the Christian faith as a positive force in the school, including for those who do not share it. As a registered charity and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee, a council of members of the company elects from their number a board of trustees to be the legal directors of the school. The preparatory school is led by an independent headmaster, but the headmaster of the senior school is overall head of the three schools. Since the previous inspection in 2005, senior management responsibilities have been reviewed when new staff took up posts, changes have been made to the use of buildings, sporting facilities have been enhanced and the boy choristers of Tewkesbury Abbey now attend the school, singing services in the Abbey during term time.
- 1.3 The school has a long history of serving families of the armed forces and clergy. Most pupils are white British, from varied social backgrounds, but a few have different ethnic origins, including a few foreign nationals. Day pupils come from a wide area. No child has a statement of special educational needs, but 93 pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 45 receive specialist help. Support is also provided for ten pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). The ability profile of the school is slightly above the national average, representing a fairly wide spread of abilities.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 The overall achievement of the pupils is excellent, because of the exemplary attitude to learning by the pupils, who approach every task with delightful enthusiasm. They go on to Dean Close Senior School or to other selective schools, often achieving scholarships. Good teaching underpins their success, although on occasions too much emphasis may be placed on photocopied resources. Marking is thorough and includes much well-deserved praise in addition to suggestions for future improvement, targeted specifically to the needs of the individual pupil. Pupils are successful beyond the classroom, with significant successes in sport and music. Extra-curricular activities contribute extremely well to school life. Enhancements to the excellent curriculum by trips and visitors also add to the school's success. The pupils in Years 5 and 7 were clearly captivated by their respective recent visits to an arboretum and Snowdon.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is excellent, with pupils often showing maturity beyond their years in the way that they look after each other and any visitors. Relationships within the school are very positive, and all adults are excellent role models. Safeguarding the welfare of the pupils is of paramount concern to every member of staff. All requisite procedures and policies are in place, and staff are trained appropriately.
- 2.3 The trustees and members of council provide good oversight of the school, and discharge their statutory duties diligently. They have vision for the school's future development and success, while maintaining the clear Christian ethos. Excellent leadership and management at all levels enable day-to-day school life to proceed calmly and efficiently. In their pre-inspection questionnaire, parents were highly supportive of all that the school does for their children, particularly appreciating the worthwhile attitudes and views promoted, and inspection findings confirmed this viewpoint. Both recommendations of the previous inspection have been met.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
1. Carry out a review of the extent and effectiveness of photocopied worksheets and other material in all subjects throughout the school.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

- 3.1 The overall achievement of the pupils is excellent. The school is entirely successful in meeting its foremost aim to offer an all-round education in a place where people feel safe, respected, secure and free to learn. Pupils show well-developed knowledge, understanding and skill in all areas of the curriculum and in a myriad of extra-curricular activities. They speak competently and confidently, listen carefully, read fluently and take care over the presentation of written work. Logical and independent thought is often evident, creativity is encouraged, mathematical skills are developed and put to good effect, and physical activity plays an important part in school life. Significant achievements include scholarships to Dean Close Senior School, sporting and other competitions and fixtures, music, speech and drama examinations, often with high grades. Within the last three years, boys' and girls' teams have been national finalists in hockey tournaments. On leaving the school, the vast majority proceed to Dean Close Senior School, competing against external candidates to be awarded places. A few are successful in gaining admission to local grammar schools at the end of Year 6, and others go on to independent schools of their choice.
- 3.2 Pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to performance against a fixed national average, but on the evidence available it is judged to be good. The pupils follow a challenging curriculum, with advanced work in English, music, art and design and technology (DT). Inspection judgements, including observed performance in relation to national targets in English and mathematics, interviews with pupils and scrutiny of their work, confirm this evaluation of the pupils' attainment. Pupils make good progress when compared with those of similar ability. Progress of the most able pupils was seen to be rapid, with some achieving success in work above expectations for their age. Interviews with pupils with SEND and scrutiny of their work showed that they make good progress, and that the guidance given at their individual support lessons has also enabled better progress in other work. Pupils with EAL were seen to make progress comparable with other pupils.
- 3.3 The pupils have excellent attitudes to their work, with strongly developed oral expression, and are notably eager and resourceful. They take pride in how their written work is presented. On many occasions, pupils work in pairs or small groups, where they openly discuss information maturely, for example in a Year 3 drama lesson, developing their own playlets on a theme. Throughout the school they can argue a case clearly, but can also listen well to the ideas of others, and then adapt their original views accordingly. Pupils are prepared to experiment, and are not afraid to take measured risks.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils).

- 3.4 The curriculum is excellent, covering all the required areas of learning. It is suitable for pupils of all ages, abilities and needs and supports the school's aim to encourage creativity, independence of thought and initiative, and to provide pupils with a body of knowledge of lasting value. The breadth of the curriculum enriches pupils' learning. Specialist language teaching challenges the linguistically able by providing the opportunity to study Spanish and some ancient Greek in addition to French and Latin, which are studied by all. Collective worship has an important place during curriculum time, and the presence of drama, art and music as both curricular and extra-curricular activities underlines the importance given to the creative arts. Information and communication technology (ICT) is embedded throughout the curriculum. The teaching of games has an important place in the curriculum, and all levels of ability are catered for; in an interview, pupils were proud to have represented the school in a 6th XI team.
- 3.5 The curriculum is supported by an exceptional range of extra-curricular activities. The school has addressed fully the recommendation of the previous inspection to monitor the extent of pupils' participation in extra-curricular activities, as now all but a handful of pupils take part in at least one activity per week. Pupils are registered for attendance at activities and unexpected absences followed up. The impressive range of activities includes musical ensembles, knit and natter, shooting, reporting, art and chess, among many others, and allows for an enhanced educational experience for all those who participate. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, pupils were highly complimentary about the range of activities, and their enjoyment of them. Pupils attending the Years 3 and 4 construction activity and Years 5 to 7 model making were seen to enjoy a welcome and uplifting period of calm and creativity, while heightening their ability to work together and to help each other. Some activities are available to everybody. Participation in others is by invitation, in accordance with the school's aim to have a range of activity suitable to develop talents, and to preserve a national reputation for excellence in some aspects of the creative and performing arts and sports and a regional reputation for strength in other major areas. Educational outings to reinforce knowledge and interest in the humanities further enhance the curriculum, including visits to historic buildings and ships and an arboretum.
- 3.6 The strong links established with a nearby local authority special school have enabled pupils to appreciate their own privileged position and to help improve the quality of life for other children. Similarly, a wide range of charity events, such as the harvest festival and 'pants for a pound' have instilled in pupils a need to give in order to help others. The attendance at the school of the boy choristers (Schola Cantorum) of Tewkesbury Abbey is of exceptional significance to the school as a whole as well as to the choristers themselves.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.7 Overall the quality of teaching is good, with much evidence of excellent practice, supporting the school's aim to provide an education based on creativity, independence of thought and initiative, and to provide pupils with a body of knowledge of lasting value.
- 3.8 The best lessons observed were characterised by teachers' excellent subject knowledge, enthusiasm and appropriate encouragement for the pupils in well-paced

lessons with frequent changes of task. A wide variety of teaching methods was seen to help stimulate pupils, for example in a mathematics lesson where guitar playing was used to enforce number bonds. In an English lesson, pupils used mini whiteboards to experiment with the spelling of root words. The very effective use of a wide range of resources was observed in many lessons. Most classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards, and pupils benefit from the creative use made of them.

- 3.9 In the best teaching observed, pupils were strongly encouraged to think and to reason for themselves and to work together. For example, in a Year 5 science lesson, pupils discussed in small groups the best way to separate pasta and paper clips, or salt and sand, and were very imaginative in their suggestions. On very rare occasions, teachers' expectations of work or behaviour were insufficiently high, or tasks were less varied, so that some pupils were unable to make optimum progress. Evidence from the scrutiny of pupils' work indicated that in some subjects excessive use is made of worksheets and other photocopied material, leading to an imbalance between work initiated entirely by teachers and that in which pupils can take responsibility for their own writing and learning and show initiative.
- 3.10 Teachers foster a highly positive relationship with their pupils. They clearly know the pupils well as individuals, recognise their strengths and cater effectively for their specific needs or personal learning styles. Teaching assistants in many areas of the school are deployed very effectively to support the learning of individuals or small groups. Classroom behaviour is generally of a very high standard, and the effort and application of the pupils is valued by staff. Pupils said that they find the marking of their work helpful. Teachers' comments were seen to be both encouraging and informative, often setting specific short-term targets. Lessons are well planned, and include the regular informal and formal assessment of pupils' learning. Thorough testing occurs through examinations, topic tests and the annual use of standardised tests.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent, fully reflecting the aims of the school to remain a flourishing community for families and to be a welcoming, caring place where there is trust and where relationships are developed. Pupils were seen to be self-assured, to have high self-esteem and to feel recognised and valued by each other and by adults. They have learnt to accept responsibility for their behaviour, to show initiative and to understand how they can contribute to community life. The programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE), known in the school as 'Life Skills', encapsulates the school's Christian values and ethos. PSHE is not confined to the weekly lessons, but is reinforced by assemblies in the school hall and services in chapel.
- 4.2 The pupils' spiritual development is excellent. They are confident and value and respect each other, developing lasting friendships. They appreciate the warm, friendly atmosphere of a school with a strong family atmosphere. The Christian ethos which underpins all that takes place is illustrated by the large numbers of pupils who freely choose to attend the Christian Union meetings, and the ease with which they discuss aspects of their personal faith. A sense of spirituality was observed in an assembly, when all the pupils fell silent of their own accord as they recognised the beauty and skill of the live music played while all took their places.
- 4.3 The pupils' excellent awareness of others and of the world around them is evident in assemblies, where a sense of morality is developed, allowing the pupils to have a strong sense of right and wrong and to respect the law. In one assembly, pupils made mature and perceptive contributions to a discussion on the relevance today of the Ten Commandments. Boarders were seen to be sensitive to the needs of each other, respecting other boarders' possessions and space, thereby developing mutual trust.
- 4.4 The social development of pupils is also excellent, and their behaviour and manners were seen nearly always to be impeccable. The vertical organisation of the day and boarding houses enables friendships and responsibilities to develop between pupils of all ages. Pupils are keen to serve as prefects, house monitors, library monitors and sports captains, and take these responsibilities most seriously. Pupils in Year 7 spoke enthusiastically about their recent visit to Snowdonia when they had been able to make friends with pupils new to the school, and to bond with classmates and teachers. Pupils were seen in lessons to be kind to one another, working cooperatively together.
- 4.5 The pupils' cultural development is excellent. Pupils are aware of different cultures by learning languages and through the history and geography curriculum. An annual week-long visit to northern France allows pupils to speak French to French people, and to visit the battle fields of the First World War. Boarders' awareness of world events and current affairs is helped by the opportunity to watch television news bulletins.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.6 The arrangements for welfare, health and safety are excellent. Staff provide highly effective support and guidance for pupils in accordance with the school's aim for people to feel safe, respected, secure and free to learn. All adults are excellent role models. Pupils of all ages were able to explain how a variety of staff help them, and were grateful for the support they receive. House tutors and form teachers all have a role to play, and this dual system gives pupils a choice of adults to whom they can turn in times of need. The chaplaincy team works in all three Dean Close schools, and clearly provides further valuable support for pupils and staff. The well-being and safeguarding of all is of utmost importance, and is in accord with all official guidance. All staff have received the necessary training in child protection.
- 4.7 Relationships are particularly positive between staff and pupils, and amongst the pupils themselves. The school's strong Christian ethos has enabled a caring environment where mutual respect is always evident between all in the school community regardless of age. School councillors from all year groups present reasoned suggestions for school improvement, brought from their peers. At the time of the inspection visits, matters under discussion ranged from the provision of more skipping ropes or the possibility of a darts club, to the request that pupils in Years 7 and 8 might have a weekly free lesson.
- 4.8 The school's procedures for promoting good behaviour and guarding against harassment and bullying are highly effective, and straightforward procedures are in place to deal constructively with the very rare occasions when unacceptable behaviour occurs. Pupils said that bullying was virtually non-existent. All procedures to ensure health and safety are effective, including comfortable provision for pupils who are ill or injured and for those who have SEND. The medical facilities in the boarding houses were seen to be particularly homely. Fire precautions are thorough, and meticulous records are kept of maintenance and of fire drills, including some held when boarders are asleep. The required plan to improve educational access for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities is in place. Admission and attendance registers are correctly maintained and archived.
- 4.9 Pupils enjoy a healthy lifestyle through the many opportunities for exercise available throughout the day in games or physical education (PE) lessons, and in their free time. Healthy food options are provided at all meals, with plenty of choice. Much food is sourced locally, and information about this provided on screens and boards at the dining room entrance. Lunch was seen to be a pleasant and enjoyable unrushed social occasion.

4.(c) The quality of boarding education

- 4.10 The quality of boarding provision is excellent. The junior house for a mixture of boys and girls in Years 3 to 5 was found to have a particularly convivial, family atmosphere, where pupils said that they feel safe, and were seen to be very well cared for. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, boarders were very positive about their enjoyment of boarding and the opportunities they are given. Their parents are equally appreciative. In all three boarding houses, the boarding experience plays an invaluable part in the pupils' education and personal development, and contributes very effectively to the school's aim to be a place where people feel safe, respected, secure and free to learn. Although boarders and day pupils spend time during the day in their respective separate houses (for example for registration sessions), all pupils were seen to be fully integrated in lessons, extra-curricular activities and free time.
- 4.11 Relationships within the boarding houses are very warm, with adults with various responsibilities living alongside the pupils and contributing to their care and welfare. An excellent range of activities is provided beyond the school day for pupils, and at weekends. The accommodation is comfortable, with most pupils housed in small dormitories, where they each have personal space to be embellished according to individual taste. Resources are plentiful and include computers, games, books and the equipment to make toast and hot chocolate, and the wider school facilities are also made available to boarders, such as computer rooms and a covered and a lit outdoor play area. The pupils enjoy their regular duties in the boarding houses, which encourage caring for shared areas as well as developing skills of tidiness and looking after possessions. Pupils keep in touch with their families regularly by email, letter writing and by the use of their own mobile phones or computer-based phones.
- 4.12 The most recent statutory boarding inspection was carried out by Ofsted in November 2008. It had only one recommendation, to include evidence of all recruitment checks listed in the Boarding Schools National Minimum Standard 38.2 in recruitment records. This was speedily implemented, and that standard has since been subsumed in other legislation.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 Governance of the school is good. The members of the larger council of members of the company and the board of trustees have a clear vision for the school's future development and direction. They ensure that worthwhile traditions are maintained, that the essential Christian ethos is ever apparent and ensure that the founding objects are fulfilled as laid out in the original Memorandum. The dual structure of governance was seen to function very effectively. The same arrangements for governance apply to the pre-preparatory and senior schools.
- 5.2 The elected members of council hold the trustees responsible through systems of annual reporting and approval of accounts. An efficient committee structure is in place, and the specific individual skills and experiences of individual members and trustees are put to very good use. The trustees are the legal proprietors of the school, and are elected from the membership of the council. They discharge well their statutory responsibilities with regard to safeguarding and other matters, and monitor very carefully the financial viability of the school. They ensure that human and physical resources are efficiently deployed to sustain academic standards, improve facilities, and ensure a diverse and rewarding educational experience for pupils. New trustees undertake good induction training on appointment, and regular training updates as necessary.
- 5.3 A trustee is in place to monitor all aspects of safeguarding in the preparatory school and to act as a conduit between the school and the board, supplementing the role of the headmaster's regular reports to the board. Staff spoke highly of the dedication and interest shown by a few trustees who take a keen interest and visit the school regularly, but were not aware of the duties or responsibilities of others. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a number of parents also commented that they were unaware of the role of the trustees or council members.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.4 The overall quality of leadership and management is excellent. As a result of strong leadership and effective teamwork, pupils receive a high quality education and are enabled to achieve. The headmaster knows every member of the school community very well as an individual, and is tireless in his efforts to ensure that the school is successful. He is ably supported by two deputies and the remaining members of the senior management team who all have clearly-defined roles, providing clear educational direction.
- 5.5 The suitability of all staff, volunteers and trustees to work with children is punctiliously checked, with computer and paper records held centrally at the senior school. All staff have received the appropriate and regularly-updated training in child protection, welfare, health and safety and were seen to understand the school's procedures well.
- 5.6 Staff appraisal procedures are on a rolling two-year programme, and valued by staff. The headmaster is appraised externally. Heads of department and others with management responsibilities are highly effective in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, in overseeing planning of the curriculum and in managing departmental budgets. The previous inspection made a recommendation to

establish a more effective system of monitoring the quality of teachers' marking. Clear and concise guidelines are now in operation, and marking was seen to be thorough and consistent. At every level, staff are supported by clear and helpful policy documentation and guidelines. Learning support staff, teaching assistants and gap-year students provide very good support for individual pupils, and the efficient work of the many further support staff adds significantly to the ongoing success of the school.

5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.7 The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians is excellent. The school maintains a highly constructive relationship with parents in accordance with its aim to remain a flourishing community for families. Parents are very happy with the education and support provided for their children and with the quality of communication with the school. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all were very satisfied with the information they receive on their children's progress and agreed that information about the school and its policies is readily available. They were overwhelmingly supportive of the school's promotion of worthwhile attitudes and views and of the provision for extra-curricular activities, particularly in the creative arts, sport and ICT. The questionnaire responses indicated the ease of communication between parents and the school, and parents' acknowledgement that the school achieves high standards of behaviour. Inspection evidence supports all these views, and also confirms the parents' appreciation of the excellent pastoral care given to day pupils and boarders.
- 5.8 Parents have many opportunities to be actively involved in the work and progress of their children. Several parents attended a lunch-time musical performance during the initial inspection visit, and parents enjoy helping with dramatic productions and other school events. Twice-yearly reports are issued, and were seen to be detailed and thorough. Parents were very satisfied with these and with information they receive at the regular parents' evenings.
- 5.9 The school's website is informative, and includes key policies and much other important information of interest to parents and prospective parents, with any sensitive items held in a password-protected section of the website. The comprehensive weekly school newsletter, available online and in printed format, celebrates successes and imparts essential information about future events including any necessary reminders. In a similar way, a boarding house newsletter allows parents of boarders to keep up to date with boarding life. The school handles the concerns of parents with care and follows its published procedures.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chairman of trustees and a further trustee, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr David Bunkell

Mrs Helen Skrine

Mrs Sara Taylor

Mr Grant Whitaker

Reporting Inspector

Head, IAPS school

Director of Studies, IAPS school

Director of Studies, IAPS school