



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION

FOR SCHOOLS WITH RESIDENTIAL PROVISION

ASHFORD SCHOOL

MARCH 2017



School's details

School	Ashford School			
DfE Number	886/6000			
EYFS Number	EY344143			
Registered charity number	1016538			
Address	East Hill Ashford Kent TN24 8PB			
Telephone number	01233 625171			
Email address	buchananm@ashfordschool.co.uk			
Head	Mr Michael Buchanan			
Chair of governors	Mr William Peppitt			
Age range	0 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll	1033			
	Boys	518	Girls	515
	Day pupils	858	Boarders	175
	Bridge Nursery	127	Pre-prep	88
	Prep	327	Seniors	332
	Sixth Form	159		
Pupils' ability	Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is average; in the sixth form it is broadly average.			
Pupils' needs	The number of pupils requiring support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is 70, 36 of whom receive extra support in school. Two pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. They require support with autism spectrum disorders. Of 163 pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL), 107 receive support.			
History of the school	Originally established in 1898 as a small school for girls, the school joined the United Church School Trust in 1998. In 2005, the school became co-			

	educational.
Ownership and governing structure	The school is owned and overseen by the United Learning Group, a charity which combines the United Church School Trust and the United Learning Trust. A local governing body has considerable delegated responsibility for non-regulatory matters and supports overall governance.
School structure	The Bridge Nursery provides for babies and toddlers. Children between 3 and 11 are educated in the pre-preparatory and preparatory school. The senior school caters for pupils aged 11 to 18. An International Centre provides an intensive one-year course in English for overseas pupils aged between 15 and 16, who are all boarders.
Other useful information	There are 4 boarding houses, 2 for boys, 1 for girls and a co-educational house for sixth-form pupils. The pre-preparatory and preparatory school has its own rural site a couple of miles from the senior school.
Inspection dates	22 to 23 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. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school’s accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school’s most recent statutory inspection.

This inspection also contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (‘boarding NMS’). It also comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and it judges the extent to which the school currently meets the boarding NMS. It identifies any standards which the school does not meet and requires action to meet them. Findings are distributed across sections relating to the eight Parts of the standards.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or 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, including the boarding NMS, 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 and any qualitative concerns identified at their previous inspection.

This is a COMPLIANCE ONLY inspection and as such reports only on the school’s compliance with the standards, including the boarding NMS. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

The inspection does not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as:

- (i) the school’s aims;
- (ii) an exhaustive health and safety audit;
- (iii) compliance with data protection requirements;
- (iv) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features;
- (v) contractual arrangements with parents;
- (vi) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups. Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Independent School Standards Regulations](#), [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

SUMMARY EVALUATION

The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015, the requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1

Quality of education provided

In the junior school, the school measures attainment using national curriculum tests. In the years 2012 to 2015, the results were above the national average for maintained schools.

At GCSE in the years 2014 to 2015, performance has been above the national average for maintained schools.

In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2014 to 2015 have been above the national average for sixth formers in maintained schools.

The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.

The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

PART 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.

The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 17 and 19 are met.

PART 3

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.

An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family and access to a programme of activities. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed. The school makes appropriate arrangements to provide long-term lodgings for some boarders.

The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996, and NMS 2–4, 6–12, 15 and 16 and 20 are met.

PART 4

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors and a register is kept as required. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.

The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 14 are met.

PART 5

Premises of and accommodation at schools

Suitable toilet, changing and showering facilities for pupils and appropriate accommodation for their medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.

The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 5 are met.

PART 6

Provision of information

A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. These include details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for those with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. They also include particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, and its results in public examinations, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.

The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and statement of boarding principles [NMS 1] are met.

PART 7

Manner in which complaints are handled

Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.

The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 18 are met.

PART 8

Quality of leadership in and management of schools

The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.

The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] and NMS 13 are met.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.

All children make good or better progress from their wide range of starting points and abilities in response to the outstanding levels of learning and care provided. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Provision for children with SEND or EAL, and those who are more able, is excellent and all children have their needs met extremely well. The children's personal, social and emotional development is given a high priority and is excellent as a result. Children clearly feel safe and secure, and are evidently happy. Members of staff are fully aware of their responsibilities regarding safeguarding and have a good understanding of how to keep children safe. The requirements for children's safeguarding and welfare have been fully met.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding.

Leaders demonstrate an ambitious vision, and high expectations of children, in all aspects of the care and education they provide. Leaders demonstrate a strong drive to improve the already outstanding provision and practice. The staff team demonstrates a real commitment to securing continuous development to improve children's life chances.

A shared approach to all aspects of management and practice ensures continuity and cohesion throughout the EYFS. Together, leaders undertake robust self-evaluation to evaluate the quality of the provision and outcomes for children. They take the views of staff, parents and children into account and use the findings to develop capacity for sustainable improvement and incisive development planning.

Leaders place great emphasis on staff development. An annual cycle of performance management and regular supervision meetings ensures that staff are extremely well supported and continuously strive to improve their practice and personal effectiveness. Through well-targeted training and appropriate professional development, staff are able to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding continuously.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum has appropriate breadth, depth and relevance. Learning programmes and planning are regularly monitored, so that they meet statutory requirements and the needs and interests of all children who attend. Assessment data is analysed regularly to identify both strengths and gaps in provision or in the learning of individual children or groups of children; any shortfalls or areas that require further attention are quickly identified and addressed effectively. Leaders are thorough in their evaluation of the impact of strategies to help individual children so that all get a good start and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Leaders and managers promote an effective and positive approach to behaviour management, to guard against bullying and to encourage understanding of the need for equality and tolerance of diversity. This is implemented consistently by staff so as to narrow gaps in outcomes between different groups of children. Arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children are highly effective. Leaders and managers ensure all staff understand their responsibilities and are well trained in child protection procedures. Regular update training ensures that staff are knowledgeable about all aspects of safeguarding, including the prevention of radicalisation and extremism.

In responses to pre-inspection questionnaires, and in discussions, parents expressed extremely positive views about the setting. Parents say they are well informed about their child's progress, have a good idea of how they can support their child at home and appreciate the daily contact they have with staff. Parents feel valued and say that their children benefit from the individual attention they receive.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding.

Well-qualified and experienced staff have an excellent understanding of how babies and young children learn and develop. They show high expectations of what children can achieve, whatever their starting points or abilities. Staff devise enjoyable, interesting and age-appropriate activities that enthuse and challenge all children. For example, the youngest children delighted in the sensory experience as they explore the textures and properties of jelly. The provision in the outdoor area does not always include equally stimulating sensory and creative activities.

High quality teaching is evident throughout the setting. Useful assessment information is gathered when children join the setting, and supplemented regularly, in collaboration with parents. This information is carefully analysed and regularly reviewed to determine what children know, can do and understand and what their next steps in learning should be in order for them to make further progress in their learning and development. Care is taken to ensure that any who are falling behind are given suitable support. Assessment information also informs curriculum planning and allows staff to provide suitable learning experiences to ensure all children make good progress and achieve well.

Interactions between staff and children are meaningful and purposeful and serve to extend children's understanding and language development. Staff engage with children during routine activities to maximise opportunities for social and language development. Staff use sign language to communicate with younger children, who respond with smiles and verbalised sounds. Older children demonstrate excellent communication and language skills for their age.

All staff are aware of the requirement to ensure equality of opportunity and celebrate diversity; activities and resources reflect this. A variety of different faiths and backgrounds are represented within the setting and a clear sense of respect for this diversity is apparent both in staff and children.

Staff liaise closely with parents to ensure that they understand their child's progress in relation to their age and how they can contribute to this. Parents receive useful information through informal discussions, as well as formal meetings and written reports. They receive regular photographic evidence of what their child is doing, in addition to a termly online assessment record. Staff actively encourage parents to contribute to their children's developmental records using an online system. The excellent two-way flow of information between parents and staff means that all children benefit from a coherent, shared approach to their learning and development and are ready for transitions to other groups.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding.

There is an extremely strong commitment to the achievement of high standards in personal development and behaviour; this is a priority in this setting. Enthusiastic and intuitive staff nurture a positive learning environment, in which children happily explore their surroundings, ask questions, take risks and use their imagination. Children of all ages are active, successful learners, seeking their own challenges and enjoying a sense of achievement when they succeed. For example, children delighted in stamping in a puddle in the garden and squealed with delight when the muddy water splashed on their feet and up their legs.

Staff encourage children to become independent and confident with much skill. The older children have a go at washing their hands, encouraged by adults who model how to do it, and use cutlery appropriately and safely.

Children are very well prepared for transitions; thoughtful, often individualised induction processes, allow them time and space to become familiar with new rooms and adults. This is managed particularly well in preparation for the move to the Nursery class, which is on a different site.

Key people build strong, warm relationships with children and their families. Children actively seek out their key person when they need reassurance or support. Staff use photographs of family members to create links

between home and nursery. This helps children settle extremely quickly when they arrive each day. Effective partnerships with parents help to develop a shared understanding of the importance of prompt and regular attendance.

Children's behaviour is exemplary. On the rare occasion that staff need to tackle unwanted behaviours, sensible age-appropriate strategies are used effectively. Children of all ages are encouraged to share and take turns and, as they get older, they demonstrate an increasing ability to manage their feelings and behaviour towards others. Whilst younger children are content to play alongside each other, sharing resources as necessary, older children play harmoniously and co-operatively with their friends.

Children of all ages are developing an understanding of how to keep themselves safe, through developing important life skills. For example, older children demonstrate how they safely negotiate steps, using the handrail as they go up or down.

Children are learning how to keep themselves healthy including through exercise, and develop a growing understanding of healthy foods.

The high priority given to personal, social and emotional development allows British values to be actively promoted in an age-appropriate way and lays firm foundations for children to develop resilience and good citizenship for their future lives.

Outcomes for children.

The outcomes for children are outstanding.

All children, including those who are more able and those with SEND and/or EAL, make good or better progress from their wide range of starting points and abilities. Thoughtfully targeted interventions provide suitable support to help narrow any gaps in learning. Children meet, and some exceed, the level of development that is typical for their age. Children are exceptionally well prepared for their journey through the setting.

The youngest children display high levels of engagement and curiosity whilst exploring the environment and the range of stimulating sensory resources on offer. Mobile babies delight in pushing large colour-changing balls around, whilst toddlers enjoy exploring with torches. Children demonstrate an interest in early writing, as they use large round chalks to make marks, whilst also developing their fine motor skills.

Across the EYFS, children use age-appropriate information and communication technology equipment confidently. Two-year-olds are excited to look at photographs of themselves and their friends taken with age-appropriate cameras. Older children use tablets and interactive whiteboards to extend their understanding of early calculation.

Children of all ages demonstrate highly developed personal skills. They thoroughly enjoy learning, working both independently and in groups. They play together well, feeling safe and turning confidently to trusted adults for support.

Compliance with statutory requirements

The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 and no action is required.

Recommendations for further improvement

The school is advised to make the following improvement to its provision for children in the early years.

- Develop the provision in the outdoor area so that it offers daily sensory and creative learning experiences.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

The inspectors observed a small sample of lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with teachers, senior members of staff and with the chairman of the local governing board. They 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

Mrs Colette Culligan	Reporting inspector
Mrs Gillian Bilbo	Accompanying Reporting Inspector
Mrs Lucy Sumner	Co-ordinating inspector for early years
Mr Paul Wilson	Compliance team inspector (Housemaster, HMC school)
Mrs Wendy Martin	Boarding Team inspector (Deputy head, SofH school)
Ms Jane Sheppard	Team Inspector for early years (Head of lower school, IAPS school)