



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports  
For Schools with Residential Provision**

**Ashford School**

**March 2020**



## Contents

<b>School's Details</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Background Information</b>	<b>4</b>
About the school	4
What the school seeks to do	4
About the pupils	4
<b>2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection</b>	<b>5</b>
Preface	5
Key findings	7
PART 1 – Quality of education provided	7
PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils	7
PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils	7
PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors	8
PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools	8
PART 6 – Provision of information	8
PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled	8
PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools	8
The quality and standards of the Early Years Foundation Stage	9
Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision	9
Quality of education	9
Behaviour and attitudes	10
Personal development	10
Leadership and management	11
Compliance with statutory requirements	11
Recommendations for further improvement	12
<b>3. Educational Quality Inspection</b>	<b>13</b>
Preface	13
Key findings	14
Recommendations	14
The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements	15
The quality of the pupils' personal development	19
<b>4. Inspection Evidence</b>	<b>25</b>

## School's Details

<b>School</b>	Ashford School			
<b>DfE number</b>	886/6000			
<b>Early Years registration number</b>	EY344143			
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1016538			
<b>Address</b>	Ashford School East Hill Ashford Kent TN24 8PB			
<b>Telephone number</b>	01233 625171			
<b>Email address</b>	reception@ashfordschool.co.uk			
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Michael Hall			
<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr William Peppitt			
<b>Age range</b>	0 to 19			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	1011			
	<b>Day pupils</b>	840	<b>Boarders</b>	171
	<b>EYFS</b>	220	<b>Juniors</b>	277
	<b>Seniors</b>	350	<b>Sixth Form</b>	164
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3 to 5 March 2020			

## 1. Background Information

### About the school

- 1.1 Ashford School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged between three months and 18 years. Originally established in 1898 as a small school for girls, it became co-educational in 2005.
- 1.2 In 1998 the school joined the United Church School Trust, known as United Learning, whose trustees have responsibility for governance, supported by a local governing body. Since the last inspection, the school has opened a second nursery and has appointed a new head of the Prep School and headmaster of Ashford School.
- 1.3 The school comprises a nursery, pre-school and prep school about three miles from the senior school site in central Ashford, which includes the four boarding houses and Bridge Nursery.

### What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school aims to create adventurous learners inside and outside of the classroom, through developing an environment where the well-being of the child is paramount. It fosters a sense of respect for individuality by encouraging intellectual freedom and creativity, determination and leadership and encourages academic confidence and curiosity, hence empowering pupils with the confidence to make a difference to their changing world.

### About the pupils

- 1.5 Day pupils come from families from a range of professional backgrounds and a variety of ethnic backgrounds, living within a 20-mile radius of the school. Most boarders come from countries in Africa, the Far East and Eastern Europe. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 203 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) including dyslexia and dyspraxia, 50 of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. There are 158 pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL); specialist support is given to those who are not yet fluent in English. Data by the school has identified 92 pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for other pupils because of their talents in academic subjects, art, drama, music or sport.

## 2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

### 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 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, including the boarding NMS, 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.

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 a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection 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. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management, together with the NMS covering the same areas. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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.

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 published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

## Key findings

- 2.1 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

- 2.2 In the prep school, the school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2016 to 2019, performance has been above the national average for maintained schools.
- 2.4 In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2016 to 2019 have been above the national average for sixth formers in maintained schools.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

### PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 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. The prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.8 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

- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 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 are met.**

#### **PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

- 2.12 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.
- 2.13 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**

- 2.14 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' 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.
- 2.15 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 5 are met.**

#### **PART 6 – Provision of information**

- 2.16 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes 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 any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, 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.
- 2.17 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are met.**

#### **PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled**

- 2.18 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.
- 2.19 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**

- 2.20 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.
- 2.21 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

- 2.22 The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.
- 2.23 Leaders have an excellent understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and use this to inspire staff to develop an exemplary EYFS curriculum, the implementation of which is carefully tracked and monitored. The previous inspection recommended that the outdoor area be further developed so that it offers daily sensory and creative experiences. This has been fully met and children are now able to access a variety of stimulating and enjoyable activities outdoors. Careful attention is paid to all curriculum and care practices so that the needs of all children including those with SEND and EAL are exceptionally well met.
- 2.24 All children, including those with SEND and EAL, make excellent progress relative to their starting points and are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education. Children's personal and emotional development is clearly well supported and the children are secure and happy, willing to engage not only with familiar staff but also with visitors.
- 2.25 The requirements for children's safeguarding and welfare are fully met and conversations with staff illustrate their strong understanding of their shared responsibilities for protecting the children in their care. Leadership and management have excellent and challenging systems that evaluate practice through thoughtful reflection, in order to enhance the educational outcomes for the fortunate children in the care of Bridge nursery.

### Quality of education

- 2.26 The quality of education is outstanding.
- 2.27 Leaders take their responsibilities for providing the best possible outcomes for the children in their care extremely seriously. They ensure that learning programmes thoroughly cover and frequently extend all the learning and development requirements of the EYFS. Staff have a firm understanding not only of their responsibility to keep children safe and promote their well-being but also how children's development and progress can be enhanced by enjoyable, challenging activities such as exploring the interesting effects when a magnet touches a metal tray, or how some yellow paint and a sponge can produce a picture of a sunny daffodil.
- 2.28 Careful attention is paid to ensure that children make consistently strong progress across the learning and development programmes of the EYFS, through planning and meticulous record keeping. The setting uses both an electronic system and a local authority tool which enables assessment to be very effectively applied in developing children's learning. Staff are exceptionally skilled at devising and providing interesting activities that engage and extend learning, particularly language, both through speech and signing so that the children are beginning to be able to communicate with others. Staff foster children's physical and social development, such as using the indoor slide not only for that enjoyable 'whoosh' but also to learn about taking turns, and how to be thoughtful about the safety of others who may be near the bottom of the slide.
- 2.29 The setting takes great care to ensure that children who attend are equipped with the necessary experiences on which can be built a secure understanding of their world and be well prepared for the next stage of their learning. Staff use their knowledge of children's development and individual circumstances to provide enjoyable and relevant opportunities. These include a thoughtful and well-equipped baby role-play area where children who are expecting or have just had a new sibling can, with the empathetic support of the adults, not only play out the caring roles from which they have benefited, but also begin to make sense of the emotional impact of this highly significant change in their family life.

## Behaviour and attitudes

- 2.30 Behaviour and attitudes are outstanding.
- 2.31 Adults are highly skilled in providing equipment and activities that enable children to choose and challenge themselves, for example when climbing up to use the indoor slide. Children delight in exploring the sounds and properties of material, such as using magnets when playing with a selection of metal toys. The youngest children showed great delight in the physical experience of immersing themselves in the ball pond. Children are actively involved not only while playing and exploring independently but also in group activities, such as listening to a story or participating in a singing session, when they are able to indicate their preferences by using words beyond those expected from children of their age. Nearly all were able to follow the actions in songs such as *Wind the Bobbin Up*, and many were able to use the appropriate sign language to accompany the singing.
- 2.32 Children show great concentration when playing with complex toys that require them to investigate a series of actions to produce the desired consequence. For example, they enthusiastically tried out different ways of moving objects by using a board featuring a range of bolts, keys and locks and this developed their thinking skills. The curriculum and practitioners reinforce desirable behaviour, such as sharing, and great attention is paid to teaching children how to control their own emotions. The setting successfully encourages regular attendance in order to establish secure routines and good habits for future learning.

## Personal development

- 2.33 The personal development of children is outstanding.
- 2.34 Thoughtful and attentive care is taken by staff to establish warm personal relationships, effectively meeting the children's need for emotional security so that they can develop and thrive. Children readily seek out their key person for the reassurance that a cuddle can provide and staff are exceptionally skilled in handling sensitively and calmly the transition from parent's arms to the setting. Adults know the children extremely well and so are aware of exactly the stage of development they have reached and what the child needs to do next in order to develop and progress. As a result of this knowledge and expertise, they are able to successfully promote children's confidence and advance their development. This was seen when adults supported and praised a child who had not yet crawled forwards. The next stage was encouraged by carefully placing a desirable and attractive toy in front of her and praising her as she successfully moved towards it.
- 2.35 Children are encouraged by adults to persevere, such as when they copied adults moving logs outdoors in order to search for mini-beasts. These creatures were then placed on dark paper so that the children could see and marvel at the glittering trails they made. Children are encouraged to challenge themselves, for example by climbing and using the slides adventurously but also carefully and safely as a result of unobtrusive close adult supervision. This was also seen when a baby on the verge of walking was carefully observed as she took steps independently using a push-along toy. The key person system is strong and well established and provides a firm base from which to establish warm secure attachments that enable the children to develop confidence and independence. For children who have EAL, staff are extremely knowledgeable about how to develop both English and the home language, enabling children to feel secure in their ability to communicate and to be understood.
- 2.36 Careful attention is paid to providing nutritious meals and ensuring that all adults are aware of allergies and preferences, through a system of individual named colour-coded place mats which indicate any specific dietary restrictions. The outdoor area is well equipped and provides for a range of physically active play that contributes to healthy development. Children are introduced to some aspects of digital technology through using simple cameras and voice recorders. Unconnected computer keyboards act as stimulus for imaginative play, where children can safely act out imitating adults, a significant aspect of their and everybody else's life in our digitally based world.

2.37 Conscientious attention is paid to all aspects of the EYFS, including the statutory requirements. Staff have a strong understanding of the importance of their role in safeguarding and are confident in their understanding of the school's policies and procedures, and what they would need to do if required. Children are helped to manage their own hygiene needs, for example by easily accessible 'nose stations'. Staff explain what they are doing when they are wiping noses, so that they acknowledge the feelings of the children and help them to begin to understand what is happening, the first step in gaining independence in this area. Staff sensitively deal with personal hygiene needs and share with parents information about readiness for the next stage of development. Displays reflect the meticulous and consistent care taken by staff to foster fundamental British values, such as an awareness of the importance of rules, sharing, making decisions, and having 'kind hands'. The diversity of the community is valued. This was seen in the range of toys and dolls of diverse ethnicities and in the various creative activities and resources. This included tasting Welsh cakes and creating daffodil artwork to mark the St David's Day celebrations that took place during the inspection.

### **Leadership and management**

2.38 Leadership and management are outstanding.

2.39 Leaders and managers demonstrate a highly ambitious vision for the setting and the children in its care. Particular attention is paid to the personal development of the staff, as the leaders believe that an excellent level of children's progress, well-being and development requires well-qualified, highly committed, emotionally-intelligent staff, who are aware that the setting values their professional and personal development, so that they can provide for the best possible outcomes for the children. Staff are provided with regular training for all statutory requirements and in addition further professional development is encouraged. This includes the recent training to develop planning that reflects the children's interests through the use of natural materials and resources, such as wood, bark, cork and shredded paper to inspire children's exploration and imagination. The initiative is designed to replace some older, more limited, commercial toys which are still in use.

2.40 Leadership provides highly-regarded, regular supervision, monitoring and appraisal. A recent initiative has been to require staff to determine a personal well-being target, in addition to professional development aims. This means that staff appreciate that the setting values their commitment highly and that their increased well-being has a beneficial impact on that of the children. Great care is taken to ensure that all children are very well supported in their individual needs so that they make excellent progress. In order to provide for the best possible outcomes for the children, leaders engage closely with parents and carers, and welcome input from external sources of support, training and expertise. Children with SEND or EAL have a high level of expert intervention, both from the setting's own highly qualified staff and from external agencies, professionals and therapists.

2.41 There is very close liaison with the next stage of education for all children and the setting pays careful attention to forwarding documentation if a child moves to another setting. Staff speak highly of the interest of the dedicated governor in the EYFS setting, and new progress and developments are regularly reported by the leadership to the board. Leaders are punctilious in ensuring that all statutory duties are fulfilled and staff clearly understood their responsibilities for safeguarding, safer recruitment, and other requirements including those of the Equality Act 2010 and the 'Prevent' strategy.

### **Compliance with statutory requirements**

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

In the context of the outstanding provision and outcomes, the setting might wish to consider:

- Increasing the use of natural materials throughout the Early Years registered setting in order to extend opportunities for imaginative play.

### 3. Educational Quality Inspection

#### Preface

**The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports 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.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. 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'.**

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

## Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils have highly developed competency in information and communication technology (ICT) and its application to their learning.
- Pupils have strong numeracy skills and can apply their knowledge and skills in mathematics to other areas of learning.
- Pupils have well-developed communication skills and apply them with confidence and sensitivity to their learning across the curriculum.
- Pupils in the junior school show excellent attitudes to study for their age, but these are not as uniformly developed in the senior school, where some pupils do not routinely engage in their own learning.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.

- Pupils respect and value diversity within society and show respect for and appreciation of their own and other cultures.
- Pupils are socially aware and so are able to work effectively with others to solve problems and achieve common goals.
- Pupils fulfil their responsibilities and contribute positively to the lives of others within the school, the local community and wider society.
- Pupils in the senior school do not consistently show personal drive and reflection, nor a desire to contribute to the school community.

## Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Ensure that all pupils in the senior school are further encouraged to take the initiative and leadership of their own learning and hence enhance their progress and attainment.
- Ensure that all pupils in the senior school are aware of the impact on their own personal development of participating in and making a more overt contribution to school life.

## The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.5 Pupils at each stage in their school career develop comprehensive subject knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning. This is because they are appropriately challenged by teaching that addresses the linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative aspects of learning. Pupils display insight into how their learning enriches their lives in line with the school's strategic priority to inspire confidence in their learning so that they embrace new experiences, learn from mistakes and take measured risks. The school's aim to encourage pupils' academic confidence and curiosity is clearly fulfilled in the prep school and in many lessons observed in the senior school. For example, prep school pupils significantly extended their arguments about keeping animals in zoos as a result of skilful prompting; in a physics lesson investigating springs, sixth-form pupils reflected more effectively because of the probing open-ended style of questions asked. Pupils learnt most effectively when teaching developed pupils' confidence to hypothesise, analyse, synthesise and engage in thinking, but these skills do not always mature as pupils move through the senior school.
- 3.6 A wide range of ability is evident throughout the school. In the prep school, close attention by teachers to individual needs, including specialist support if needed, is the main reason for the excellent progress of all groups. In the EYFS, all children make excellent progress consistent with their age and development. By the end of Reception, the majority are exceeding many of the Early Learning Goals. In the prep school, the standardised data provided by the school show that in all year groups the vast majority of pupils are achieving at their expected outcomes, which enable pupils to enter the next phase of their education well prepared. Data provided by the school show that over the last three years Ashford pupils have achieved GCSE grades above the average for pupils nationally, and in line or just above the grades expected for their ability. In the same period, A-level results have been above those of pupils nationally, but in line with expectations for pupils' ability. The school's leadership is aware of and is exploring the possible causes of the inconsistencies between different groups and age. For example, statistically EAL pupils and boarders achieve less well than other pupils at GCSE, but better at A level. Pupils with SEND attain in line or just below others at both GCSE and A level, and their progress is buttressed by the personalised support in small classes. Data provided suggests that lower ability pupils make greater progress than others in the three years to GCSE. More able pupils are identified and challenged to develop their thinking through the multi-age scholars' group, and these pupils consistently achieve good levels of success in a wide range of external competitions, particularly in mathematics and science. Pre-inspection questionnaire results showed that the vast majority of parents were positive about the teaching that enabled pupils to make progress and develop skills for their future. The large majority of university applicants achieved admission to their first or second choice of university.
- 3.7 Pupils' oral and written communication is excellent. They are articulate and speak with confidence. This is promoted through teaching which adeptly encourages pupils to ask searching questions and engage in thoughtful discussion. Pupils explain their thoughts with precision and use an extensive vocabulary. Prep school pupils demonstrated a clear awareness of the audience in an assembly for parents. The quality of written work is excellent, showing pupils take a pride in their writing for a particular purpose, for example, in the empathy of 'kindness' postcards sent by younger pupils to residents in a local care home. A GCSE pupil with SEND conveyed a good depth of understanding in writing about the Spanish Armada, benefiting from carefully targeted teacher support. Essay work undertaken by senior school pupils shows a well-structured approach which becomes stylistically more sophisticated and nuanced as pupils mature. A love of reading was seen throughout the school in vibrant displays, the use of the libraries and the support of librarians in guiding pupils' choices.
- 3.8 Prep school pupils demonstrate good study and research skills for their age, including independent use of ICT resources to extend their learning in mathematics and science. In discussion, some boarders

felt that their progress was helped by structured study time and access to academic staff. Younger pupils in the senior school concentrate well, applying effectively in their learning the 'Ashford School learning habits' of resilience, independence, scholarship and curiosity, but the approach is not sustained in the older age groups. The school has already identified the need to ensure that more learning is 'pupil-led'. Extended work reflecting pupils' perseverance and reflection was seen in sixth form art portfolios, which showed sustained work done between lessons. Through their dedication and commitment many pupils achieve high standards in musical performance across a wide range of instruments, and many others enjoy the plentiful opportunities in drama.

- 3.9 Pupils confidently select appropriate mathematical processes when required across a range of curriculum areas and demonstrate convincing mathematical subject knowledge. For example, one child in Nursery chosen to add up the children in class counted accurately to 14. The most able pupils demonstrate excellent numerical skills, as exemplified through successes in a range of external mathematical challenges. Pupils competently incorporate their mathematical knowledge in a range of different contexts, for example GCSE pupils plotting graphs in geography. Mathematical progress is achieved through skilled, demanding teaching and the use of carefully focused ICT resources. For example, in a sixth-form further mathematics lesson, pupils made excellent use of graphical calculators to verify their independent solutions to trigonometric equations. Prep school pupils are challenged by a progressive mathematics curriculum which, with appropriate support from teaching assistants, successfully promotes the progress of all abilities. Data provided by the school show that the grades achieved by pupils in A-level mathematics are higher than expected for their ability.
- 3.10 Pupils' achievements in external competitions, in gaining other academic distinctions, and in sport and the arts are good. Pupils gain speech and drama awards and over 200 pupils are successfully involved in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, leading to the development of a wide range of skills. Questionnaire results showed that the vast majority of parents were positive about the range of subjects and extra-curricular activities that the school offered. The school promotes participation in sport to enable nearly every pupil to be part of a team, although a small minority of boarders are resistant to these opportunities. Sporting success is achieved in a wide range of sports: the school regularly wins county titles, and individuals have achieved national recognition in modern pentathlon. Pupils develop high levels of resilience, perseverance and teamwork through their committed engagement in the wide range of creative and performing arts available to them. Pupils valued working with theatre professionals as role models in supporting school productions, and the artist in residence scheme is influential in creating a dynamic additional inspiration for pupil creativity. As a result of the enthusiastic commitment of pupils to achieve personal success, the pupils who participate in the activities offered outside the classroom attain high standards and for many this results in a resilient, well-grounded approach in other areas of their lives.
- 3.11 Many pupils show excellent attitudes to learning, but the school has yet to succeed in satisfying for every pupil its priority to inculcate a culture that delivers positive learning habits. Prep school and EYFS pupils bubble with energy when expressing their desire to learn new things; for example in the EYFS when children were able to select a new story for an adult to read. The prep school promotes a 'have a go' attitude underpinned by the 'BBB' approach – brain, buddy and finally boss (the teacher), which gives confidence to pupils to become active learners. This was seen in a Year 2 maths lesson where pupils were able to create arrays and then record their results, self-correcting their errors as they went. Such approaches ensure lessons are productive and learning is effective as there is a clear expectation that all pupils take responsibility for their own learning. The pupils' commitment to success is due to high expectations and consistent role models, which reflect the school's values. Some senior school pupils, including some boarders, are more reticent in their approach; they can be passive and do not habitually seek to actively engage with their learning. Some boarders, in particular, have not assimilated the approach encouraged by themes of the 'Ashford School learning habits'.
- 3.12 Pupils demonstrate an excellent range of ICT skills, using resources for organisation, research and presentation across a range of subjects. Pupils use ICT to undertake research with real expertise across

the school. For example, in a Year 3 history lesson about Anglo-Saxon gods, pupils used tablet computers and a history app to successfully research and record facts about their god and then synthesise this information. Through the focused and motivating leadership of senior leaders in digital technology and the support of the governing body learning opportunities have been transformed in the school and others in the United Learning group. Parents have been fully involved through a range of digital publications, which help them to support their children's learning in a safe environment. As a result, the role of ICT in the school has become authentic and fundamental to pupils' learning. The school is thus moving towards its aim to be recognised nationally and internationally as a centre of excellence to make a difference in a changing world.

### **The quality of the pupils' personal development**

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.14 The school successfully realises its priority to support pupils with continuous understanding and care throughout their education. Pupils are responsible, confident and have a well-developed sense of self-reflection. Pupils exhibit self-confidence without arrogance. These qualities are developed by the school, meeting its aims to promote reflection, resilience, independence and tolerance, and a sense of responsibility in its pupils. Pupils' clear sense of responsibility, confidence and self-esteem draws upon examples set by adults and the demand for high standards of behaviour, responsibility and moral purpose throughout the school community.
- 3.15 Pupils socialise confidently with each other. This starts at the EYFS stage where children would ask if they could hold another's hand, before doing so, which is unusual in such young children. Pupils are skilled at maintaining excellent friendships based on mutual respect and provide support to one another. The questionnaire highlighted that most boarders feel they get on well together and work collaboratively across cultures in the school, despite social groupings inevitably formed by shared language and experiences. Pupils' support for others is spontaneous. The school's leadership creates a culture of easy relationships and social confidence. Pupils collaborate well, for example when older prep school pupils support younger ones in their reading. Pupils show well-developed empathetic skills when working together, across the year groups and in houses, solving problems and achieving common aims, as they produce a wide range of musical, dance and drama productions and organise charitable events.
- 3.16 In discussions, prep school pupils revealed a good understanding of right and wrong and the development of self-esteem, as they reflected on how they improve their own learning and performance through a range of strategies underpinned by making good choices. Prep school pupils readily demonstrate reflection and awareness of personal and social situations affecting themselves and others. Older prep school pupils reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* reflected with insight on the injustices suffered by Jews in the Second World War. Children in the EYFS show a clear understanding of rules and the importance of behaving correctly, expressed in terms of right and wrong choices, which lead them to be kind to one another and their teachers. Pupils at the senior school are respectful of the school rules and usually accept responsibility for their own behaviour in a mature manner. Their behaviour towards one another is good. They have a full understanding that it is unacceptable to be a bystander.
- 3.17 These positive outcomes are developed through a well-organised, caring pastoral system and personal social health education programme, which has developed a mutually supportive set of common values, the 'Ashford learning habits'. This leaves all pupils knowing there is always someone to whom to talk and that they will be supported in making the right decision when facing difficult choices. They are prepared to challenge injustice.
- 3.18 Prep school pupils have extremely well-developed decision-making skills and understand that the decisions they make are important in determining their own success and well-being. This is because

the school provides a nurturing environment which encourages reflection and the skills to determine academic and extra-curricular targets. Pupils' informed decision-making skills are also the result of a school culture, embedded by the leadership, which requires pupils to make their own decisions from the Nursery onwards. There, for example, children can choose when to have their fruit snack from the display. Prep school pupils on the school council are influential in school life, for example in developing provision for wet play times. There are fewer examples of senior school pupils taking initiative outside formal leadership roles or of boarders seizing the wider opportunities available. Pupils are able to make well-informed academic choices at GCSE and beyond. They have the freedom to be flexible in the number of options that they take as they are carefully supported in their decisions by the school. There was evidence in the senior school of some pupils not choosing to behave appropriately or focus consistently in lessons.

- 3.19 Pupils develop spiritual understanding through a range of activities. In particular, in the prep school staff encourage pupils to pause and reflect on any experience which may result in a sense of awe and wonder during their day. Pupils were spontaneous in their joy of music and were free to express themselves through dance and song. Several played 'air guitar' in pre-prep choir. Pupils have an appreciation of the non-material aspects of life, seen in discussions regarding their understanding of world religions and mindfulness and the effect that simply looking at the world can have. For example, the senior school trips to Iceland to seeing the Northern Lights and to Canterbury Cathedral to see the interiors made pupils think beyond the here and now. Pupils' development in this respect is supported by opportunities for reflection and discussions with staff regarding mortality and life. These enable pupils to think carefully on their place in the world. In a trip to Germany, pupils were moved by a visit to a former concentration camp and expressed gratitude for their own personal circumstances. Likewise, EYFS children found beauty in the natural world as seen in their images of sunflowers in the style of Van Gogh.
- 3.20 Pupils demonstrate excellent relationships with one another, irrespective of culture or background. In that context, the school successfully realises its strategic priority to enhance the pupils' learning experience by promotion of diversity and internationalism. The house system encourages successful relationships as older pupils fully embrace the responsibility to look after younger pupils and help them with their relationships. Pupils demonstrate strong mutual respect towards one another and value others highly. For example, in a Reception display on teamwork, children's own thoughts about the importance of working together to tidy up and listening to our friends showed clearly that teamwork was strongly understood and valued by the children. This is mirrored in the senior school where older pupils take responsibility for house competitions in drama and music, organising and motivating younger pupils and boarders enjoy cooking together. Pupils can be themselves and are respected for their individuality and what they bring to the school community. The school promotes a culture of taking 'informed risk' which is reinforced through the support for pupils seen in lessons when they hypothesise and are encouraged to articulate their responses, fully supported by their peers. This further reflects the impact of the boarding community on pupils' strong teamwork and social skills, a view supported by the vast majority of parental questionnaires.
- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and appreciate how to be physically and mentally healthy, particularly in terms of diet, exercise and living a balanced lifestyle. The school's strategic priority to embed well-being as part of its culture is supported by the very high proportion of positive responses to the pupil and parent questionnaires. The prep school council enables pupils to feel that they have a voice as they make reasoned choices in pursuing a healthy lifestyle, and Nursery children explained clearly why they needed exercise and enough sleep to stay healthy. Boarders felt that their suppers are not sufficiently varied or appetising and suggested that this impacts on their morale and desire to contribute fully to the life of the school. Pupils take advantage of a wide-ranging programme of sport and other vigorous physical activities and learn how to stay safe and be healthy from the role models provided by both staff and older pupils. They move on to the next stage in their lives with confidence and self-assurance, wanting to live adventurously whilst approaching the concept of risk sensibly.

- 3.22 Pupils have well-developed levels of sensitivity to pupils from different backgrounds and traditions. This comes from the added dimension that overseas boarders bring to the school community, from global citizenship lessons in the prep school and from extra-curricular activities, for example making ANZAC biscuits in cooking club. Senior school pupils spoke very positively about the power that authentic first-hand speakers bring to their understanding of ideas on, for example, the underlying societal issues that promote knife crime and drug abuse. Pupils are committed to the ethos that everybody is equal, which is evident from the positive relationships that exist across the school. In discussion with inspectors, pupils exhibited cultural curiosity and spoke warmly of the wide range of overseas trips, including language exchanges, offered by the school. Pupils are supportive of peers who have disabilities or are less fortunate than themselves, for example by helping at a local night shelter. This exemplifies the school's aim to empower young people to make a difference in their changing world.

## 4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 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 house and form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

Mr Ian Carter	Reporting inspector
Mr Steven Popper	Assistant reporting inspector
Mr Edward Bond	Compliance team inspector (Senior master, HMC school)
Miss Naomi Bartholomew	Team inspector (Headmistress, GSA and IAPS school)
Mr Rhys Johnston	Team inspector (Deputy head, IAPS school)
Mr Bryan Kane	Team inspector (Former academic deputy head, IAPS school)
Mrs Christine Rees	Team inspector (Former head of boarding HMC school)
Dr Richard Robson	Team inspector (Former headmaster, HMC school)
Mr Andrew Williams	Team inspector for boarding (Headmaster, HMC school)
Mrs Eithne Webster	Co-ordinating inspector for early years (Former head of KS1, IAPS school)
Miss Sally Donaldson	Team inspector for EYFS (Head of kindergarten, HMC school)