

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

Cobham Hall School

September 2021

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School's Details

School	Cobham Hall S	chool			
DfE number	886/6044				
Registered charity number	1064758				
Address	Cobham Hall S	chool			
	Brewers Road	Brewers Road			
	Cobham				
	Kent	Kent			
	DA12 3BL	DA12 3BL			
Telephone number	01474 823371	01474 823371			
Email address	enquiries@cobhamhall.com				
Headmistress Mrs Wendy Barrett		irrett			
Chair of governors	Mr Elliot Lipto	Mr Elliot Lipton			
Age range	11 to 18	11 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	131	131			
	Day pupils	93	Boarders	38	
	Seniors	106	Sixth Form	25	
Inspection dates	28 September	28 September to 1 October 2021			

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1. Background Information

About the school

1.1 Cobham Hall is an independent day and boarding school for female pupils aged between 11 and 18 years. It is a registered charity and part of the Mill Hill Foundation, overseen by a governing body who are also the trustees. The school opened in 1962 in Cobham Hall, a Tudor manor house in 150 acres of parkland. It belongs to the Round Square organisation. The school has two boarding houses on site, one for Years 7 to 11 and one for the sixth form.

- 1.2 The current headmistress took up her post in September 2020 and the school merged with The Mill Hill School Foundation in March 2021.
- 1.3 During the period March to August 2020, the senior school remained open only for children of key workers. No boarders remained on-site. During this period of closure the school provided remote learning materials for all pupils.
- 1.4 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on-site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.5 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.6 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021, all pupils other than the children of key workers or vulnerable pupils received remote learning provision at home.
- 1.7 In 2020 and 2021, public examinations were not held. For pupils who would have been expected to take these examinations, centre-assessed grades were awarded in 2020 and teacher-assessed grades in 2021.

What the school seeks to do

1.8 The school seeks to provide excellence in education and bring out the potential of every pupil. It aims to create confident, successful healthy students who lead happy fulfilling lives. The school intends to establish a strong sense of community and environmental awareness.

About the pupils

1.9 Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds, representing both professional and non-professional families. The school's international students come from 26 different countries, with China and Nigeria providing the largest numbers. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the range of abilities on entry to the school is broadly average. The school has identified 43 pupils as having special educational needs and /or disabilities (SEND), of whom 28 receive additional support. English is an additional language (EAL) for 21 pupils, of whom 11 receive additional support for their English. Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school modifies the curriculum for the more able pupils in the school's population.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, including the National Minimum Standards for Boarding ('boarding NMS'), where applicable. Additionally, inspections report 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. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are 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 FOCUSED 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 <u>met</u> or as <u>not met</u>. 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 standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. 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 standards and requirements can be found here: <u>The Education (Independent School Standards)</u> Regulations 2014, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools.

COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.

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 and associated requirements and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 At GCSE in the years 2018 to 2021, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2020 to 2021 have confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs1-4] 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. Any 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 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.

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.

The headline judgements apply 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 a good level of knowledge across the subjects and can use their skills and understanding effectively.
 - Pupils persevere assiduously in their studies and want to achieve well.
 - Pupils make good progress in their learning throughout the school.
 - Pupils are articulate, confidently expressing their ideas, inside and outside the classroom.
 - Pupils demonstrate positive and enthusiastic attitudes towards learning within both the curriculum and in the extra-curricular programme.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
 - Pupils show strong levels of resilience and self-understanding.
 - Pupils demonstrate considerable insight about the world, reflecting the international ethos of the school.
 - Pupils display outstanding behaviour throughout the school and have a clear understanding of right and wrong.
 - Pupils show a strong commitment to the concept of service and actively support the community inside and outside of the school.
 - Pupils work together very successfully in their lessons and in their activities beyond the classroom.

Recommendations

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:
 - Review the school's strategy towards challenging the academic aspirations of pupils in order to develop further their knowledge and understanding.
 - Ensure that pupils are able to make the most of their potential, through assessment which consistently supports their progress across the school.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.5 The school achieves its aims of developing pupils' academic knowledge so that they can find their path in life, centred on the school's belief that there is more in you than you think. The results at GCSE are good with, on average, 89% of the grades at 9-4 in the years 2017 to 2019. This compares with a national average of 70%. The results from centre-assessed and teacher-assessed grading in 2020 and 2021 indicate that these are in line with previous performance. The school moved to A levels from the IB in the academic year 2020–2021 so it is not possible to make a fair comparison between the centreassessed grades of 2021 and the IB results of 2017 to 2019. Pupils with SEND and EAL achieve results above expectations across the subjects, on average achieving one grade higher than the results achieved by pupils of similar ability nationally, with the main cohort on average achieving more than half a grade. Pupils in the sixth form undertake the Educational Project Qualification (EPQ) with 82% of grades achieved at A*-B, further extending their expertise and knowledge. They have chosen subjects as diverse as designing a ball-gown from recycled paper, preparing and running a workshop on physical activity, and a study of the reasons for mass persecutions in history. Pupils make good progress over time, supported by a detailed system of tracking progress, used effectively by the teachers and boarding staff and monitored closely by the school's leaders. This was clear from the scrutiny of pupils' work across different year-groups in the school and supported by the positive responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, affirming that the school helped pupils to make progress in their learning and met their individual needs effectively.
- 3.6 Pupils display a solid knowledge and understanding of their work across the subject areas and willingly present their own ideas in lessons, promoted by some effective teaching, which takes into account the diversity of backgrounds and abilities and enables steady progress. The confidence of the pupils within the classrooms, laboratories and creative areas of the school shows their competence in different aspects of learning. and this is confirmed by the positive view in the questionnaire that pupils are well-prepared with the skills for later life. Pupils display a good level of knowledge both in lessons and in their written work. In a senior geography lesson, pupils used good prior knowledge of the topic, with some individuals using sophisticated terminology to explain the advantages of an out-of-town shopping area, over the traditional town centre. Pupils made steady progress in their musical understanding in a lesson which focused on key terms for musical notation, linked to Corelli's *Christmas Concerto*. Pupils clearly improve their learning, helped by a solid approach to teaching but there is scope for a greater challenge in lessons at times. Similarly, pupils benefit from useful guidance on improvement, in their books, though this is not always apparent from the work seen and in discussion with some pupils.
- 3.7 Pupils articulate their ideas very effectively both in discussion and on paper. Their communication skills develop as a result of a teaching approach which encourages pupils' contribution through tasks that involve discussion. Pupils develop their communication skills outside of the classroom successfully through the varied opportunities provided by the school, such as debating, creative writing and humanities clubs and they develop confidence in their use of language, across a range of subject disciplines. Purposeful and well-directed teaching in a range of subjects facilitates this development, alongside the valued encouragement from the boarding staff. Pupils with SEND or EAL feel secure in the progress of their communication skills and say that they appreciate the additional support that is provided in subject clinics or from teaching assistants. They speak confidently in class and both boarders and day pupils make good progress in their written and verbal communication.
- 3.8 The standard of numeracy in the school is good and pupils are confident in their handling of mathematical concepts. Some enthusiastic and dedicated teaching enables this. Leaders' recent introduction of a cross-curricular approach to numeracy has enhanced the pupils' learning and appreciation of how numerical skills can impact on their lives. The pupils in a junior mathematics lesson were all engaged fully in the work and clearly enjoyed the range of activities presented to them, that enhanced their learning. In a senior computer science lesson, pupils showed a sound grasp of the

- varying forms of memory in a computer and a good appreciation of the differences in their practical performance.
- 3.9 The teaching of computer science produces a good understanding of information and communication technology (ICT) for those pupils studying the subject within the curriculum. Other pupils use aspects of ICT in their work with considerable confidence, as seen in a junior history lesson where their own devices were used effectively for research into the Battle of Hastings and to enhance their understanding. In a senior English lesson, pupils again made good use of ICT to further their appreciation of styles of literary language in Victorian novels.
- 3.10 Pupils make good progress with the development of their study skills, in keeping with the philosophy of an approach to education focused on developing individual skills for learning, faithful to the Round Square organisation to which the school belongs. External providers deliver specific study-skills training to the students and from the lessons observed, it was clear that pupils can engage fully and successfully with the demanding range of tasks required to improve their learning. However, in some lessons, this is not always the case and here the teaching needs to ensure that pupils are challenged to develop their skills fully. In a senior English lesson, pupils demonstrated a strong ability to analyse the texts at hand. They spoke confidently about the progress that they had made in understanding the texts, seen also in the scrutiny of their work. Pupils gain useful study skills from their work in what the school terms personal discovery framework lessons, which focus on their individual needs. Pupils in the sixth form develop a broad view of the world through a course on global critical thinking and extend their understanding of current world issues further.
- 3.11 Pupils develop a broad set of valuable skills as a result of the opportunities in the extra-curricular programme, provided and resourced by leaders and governors. They achieve success in a range of activities with pupils passing LAMDA and ABRSM examinations at all levels. Many pupils participate enthusiastically in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DoE) and achieve success in bronze, silver and gold awards. Pupils achieves success in sporting activities, both at team level and through individuals gaining recognition beyond the school. For example, some individuals have been selected for the county netball squad, and others have achieved success in regional swimming and cross-country competitions. The quality of the pupils' art, seen displayed throughout the school, is excellent.
- 3.12 Positivity is a hallmark of learning at Cobham Hall as pupils engage fully with their teaching and learning, across a range of disciplines, stimulated to do so by some enthusiastic teaching. This determined attitude was apparent in most pupils in the lessons observed. Those pupils with individual learning needs are well supported within the curriculum and develop good learning habits. Boarders are as successful in this respect as day pupils, a reflection of the caring and supportive atmosphere in the boarding houses. Pupils work together effectively and also equally well on their own. Pupils in single-person classes show a determined perseverance in their learning. Senior pupils were observed helping with organising an activity in the sports hall, timing intervals and offering positive encouragement to the pupils who were running.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 The pupils reflect in a meaningful way about who and what they are, encouraged by the ethos of the school, which seeks to develop the skills needed for the outside world, beyond those of purely academic achievement. Responses to the questionnaires indicate that this is much appreciated. Pupils spoke of how their confidence had been strengthened by the opportunities to participate in the Model United Nations (MUN) assembly and in a junior drama lesson, pupils had to imagine themselves as scullery maids in the nineteenth century Cobham Hall, which they did with genuine empathy. This type of reflection builds excellent self-awareness, discipline and resilience, seen in registration sessions when pupils confidently discussed their ideas or in a senior history lesson where pupils analysed the changing role of the aristocracy perceptively. An example of the resilience of the pupils is evidenced

- in the confident manner in which pupils interact in classes with smaller numbers. Pupils learn in a manner which prepares them for the next stages in their journey through life, by reflecting at a deep level, which causes them to pause and think seriously about the implications for themselves and others. The teaching and the direction from the school's leaders and governors enable the pupils to engage and develop fully with the challenges of the world.
- 3.15 Pupils demonstrate a strong understanding of the thinking that goes into making the right decisions and this was seen both in lessons and in their activities beyond the classroom. In an art club, pupils thought carefully about which painting technique would best achieve their objective and senior pupils described how they took responsibility for deciding how to plan their own study time effectively. Pupils show a level of considered and informed decision-making promoted by a broad curricular approach which embraces both the needs of academic achievement and personal development and is shaped by the school's senior leaders and implemented wholeheartedly by the staff. Senior pupils are full of praise for the advice and direction they had been given in planning for the next stage of their education and feel well-prepared for their lives ahead. They also felt that the school's well-being programme helped empower them to make good decisions about their daily lives.
- 3.16 Pupils learn to understand the importance of those deeper values beyond the basic needs in life, through the beauty of the environment in which they live and through the example set by the school's core values. Consequently, whilst there may not be an overt spirituality in the school in terms of specific lessons or chapel, pupils have a genuine understanding of the need to look after themselves as people and of the world around them, appreciating the intrinsic value of inner strength. There is a thoughtful level of understanding among the pupils, with regard to the non-material aspects of life. For example, pupils show a strong interest in the environment and express a wish to take action to support global concerns in this area. Groups have undertaken beach-cleaning tasks as part of this engagement. They are very aware of the importance of looking after their lives, taking time for reflection. The strong support from the pastoral care system guides both boarding and day pupils towards this sense of self-worth. Pupils have an excellent awareness of other cultural traditions, helped by the inclusive quality of the school with its diverse, international community. The school's assemblies, often led by the pupils, further enhance this spiritual appreciation.
- 3.17 Pupils display an excellent level of behaviour and there is a strong sense of calmness in the school. Pupils take responsibility for themselves but also are very aware of the needs of others. If they act poorly, they understand the importance of making amends and supporting each other. In this they are directed by the school's values and approach to all aspects of learning with clear examples from a committed staff. The pupils exhibit a strong sense of right and wrong through their discussion of moral issues within the tutorial programme and through activities such as the MUN. A large majority of pupils feel confident in the moral and behavioural framework that the school's leadership provides and there is an individual and corporate responsibility shown by pupils, both inside and outside the classroom.
- 3.18 Pupils work together very successfully, which empowers them to develop a strong awareness of social issues and needs and this is encouraged by the school's tradition of collaborative effort. Pupils benefit from the excellent atmosphere of community in the boarding houses and all through the school, which enables older pupils to support younger pupils and represent their views in the school council. Pupils demonstrate excellent teamwork skills inside and outside the classroom and they talk enthusiastically about the projects they are involved in, such as MUN and DoE. They speak warmly of their enjoyment of the Saturday programme and say how they gain real benefit from the challenges in completing the varied projects, such as an environmental group on saving the planet or one, preparing and organising an international café. A junior modern languages lesson about the theme of homelessness provoked a thoughtful discussion among the pupils of the causes and consequences of homelessness.
- 3.19 Pupils at the school are very positive about working for others, through charity fund-raising and in community projects, promoted by the school's ethos which stresses the importance of service. This sense of community goes not just beyond the immediate school grounds but also in the pupils' interest in world issues, through activities such as the environmental club and helped by the wide range of

- nationalities in the school. Pupils draw upon their knowledge and skills to involve themselves fully and the school encourages them to do so. Pupils participate and broaden their appreciation for the community, through activities such as litter-picking, organising the celebrations for bonfire night in the local community and a recycling boxes project. The boarding houses contribute significantly to this sense of community and the boarders appreciate warmly the support they receive with their learning and in their daily lives and gain considerable confidence from their caring environment.
- 3.20 Pupils across the school show an excellent cultural understanding and respect for diversity. They benefit here from the wide range of cultures in the school which introduces them to the world around them, truly living up to leaders' and governors' Round Square vision. Pupils successfully learn to appreciate the crucial importance of being tolerant and respectful in this diverse and multi-cultural community. Pupils learn these attitudes through events acknowledging special national days with assemblies and cultural meals and also, in the easy and warm manner in the school, in which differences in people are accepted and enjoyed. Pupils have an increased appreciation of their global existence, in turn promoted by the school's successful meeting of its aim to prepare pupils for life in the international world. Pupils display a high level of respect and understanding for the world around them and a collective determination as a community to embody these values and promote equality, diversity and inclusion, as reflected in the positive parental response in the questionnaire.
- 3.21 Pupils develop as healthy individuals through the strong culture of pastoral support and concern for welfare in the school. They have an excellent, positive approach to life, encouraged by the school's pastoral leaders and staff. The pupils reflected warmly upon the lessons they had received from the physical education and pastoral departments and how much they learned from these. In interviews, pupils expressed their confidence in knowing how to take care of themselves online and with their physical and mental health, so that they are fully prepared to move forward into the outside world.

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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 the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and 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 Gareth Price Reporting inspector

Mrs Jayne Offer Compliance team inspector (Director of human resources, HMC

school)

Mr Simon Leyshon Team inspector for boarding (Deputy head, HMC school)

Dr James Whitehead Team inspector (Head, HMC and GSA school)