



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Bedford Girls' School

January 2020



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School's Details

School	Bedford Girls' School			
DfE number	822/6012			
Registered charity number	1066861			
Address	Bedford Girls' School Cardington Road Bedford Bedfordshire MK42 0BX			
Telephone number	01234 361900			
Email address	information@bedfordgirlsschool.co.uk			
Head	Miss Jo MacKenzie			
Chair of governors	Ms Tina Beddoes			
Age range	7 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	915			
	Juniors	229	Seniors	547
	Sixth Form	139		
Inspection dates	14 to 16 January 2020			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Bedford Girls' School is an independent day school for female pupils aged 7 to 18 years. The school is overseen by a board of governors, most of whom are trustees of the Harpur Trust.
- 1.2 The school comprises three departments: the junior school, for pupils aged 7 to 11 years; the senior school, for pupils aged 11 to 16 years; and the sixth form, for pupils aged 16 to 18 years.
- 1.3 The school, which is situated on the banks of the Great Ouse, was formed through the merger of two separate Harpur Trust schools. The junior school opened in 2010, the senior school in 2011 and the sixth form in 2012. Since the previous inspection the school has refurbished the science department.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school aims to strive for excellence in all that it does. It seeks to support and challenge its pupils and enable them to develop the skills and attributes to become self-assured, open-minded thinkers who are inspired to go out and make a positive difference to the world around them.

About the pupils

- 1.5 The majority of pupils come from a range of professional backgrounds, mostly from families living in a wide variety of areas around Bedford and surrounding counties. Data provided by the school indicates that the ability of pupils in the school is above average compared to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 25 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, attention deficit disorder and autism spectrum disorder, all of whom require specialist support. One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Thirty-seven pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL), four of whom require specialist support for their English.

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. 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.

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 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. 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. 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](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, 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 junior school, the school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2017 to 2019, performance has been above the national average for maintained schools.
- 2.4 In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2017 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.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is 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 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

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

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.13 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.

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 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.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 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.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 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.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is 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.

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 excellent.
- The pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding. They readily take a lead in their studies and in the many activities that support the curriculum.
 - The pupils' ability to listen, reflect, debate with authority and communicate in writing, is excellent.
 - Pupils develop excellent skills for learning from an early age, including the ability to synthesise and analyse complex information from a wide variety of sources.
 - Pupils demonstrate highly developed information and communication (ICT) skills which enhance and extend their learning.
 - Pupils excel in a wide variety of sporting, creative and academic extra-curricular activities.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils embrace the many opportunities to improve the lives of others and make an outstanding contribution to the community within and beyond school.
 - Pupils are bold and reflective decision makers.
 - Pupils are naturally inclusive and demonstrate strong acceptance of those who have different backgrounds or beliefs to their own.
 - The pupils' excellent moral and social development is reflected in a community which is built on kindness and mutual respect.

Recommendation

- 3.3 Within the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:
- Enhancing the pupils' understanding of the implications of a healthy diet on their well-being, by increasing their opportunities to make well-informed dietary decisions.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning. They are highly motivated and are determined to make the most of all opportunities that the school provides for them. Within the classroom, pupils of all ages work collaboratively. For example, during a junior school English lesson, pupils showed excellent levels of co-operation and sensitivity when working in groups to write a play script. Pupils relish opportunities to take the initiative, as seen in a GCSE computer science lesson where pupils added extra functionality to their coding to limit the number of login attempts, and to play a sound on successful login. Pupils take a high level of responsibility for their studies, demonstrating an intrinsic motivation and determination to do well. This is because staff ensure that the pupils know what is expected of them. This fulfils the aim of the school for pupils to strive for excellence in all that they do.
- 3.6 Pupils make rapid progress in developing knowledge, skills and understanding as a result of the high expectations and effectively prepared teaching. They explore ideas in depth and make excellent use of concepts acquired in previous lessons. For example, under the careful guidance of their teachers, senior pupils demonstrated an excellent understanding of how kneading time alters the amount of gluten produced in bread. Similarly, sixth form pupils demonstrated their extremely good knowledge of Greek culture and literature when discussing the poetry of *Sappho*, and displayed advanced creative skills and flexible thinking when interpreting artwork through the lens of music. Almost all parents and

most pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that teaching enabled the pupils to make progress. In lessons observed during the inspection pupils were very keen to learn and engage with the lessons that they attended.

- 3.7 Pupils exhibit excellent communication skills and are able to express themselves eloquently, both in lessons, where they use subject specific terminology with great ease, and in their day to day interactions. This was particularly evident in a sixth form English lesson where pupils discussed complex themes from *All My Sons* and *Spies*. In discussions, junior school pupils spoke with clarity about the confidence they have gained through performing in the Christmas production. Pupils of all ages display notably strong listening skills when listening to teachers and to their peers. For example, in a lower school mathematics lesson pupils listened very attentively to each other as they explained how to solve problems involving indices. Pupils are able to verbalise their thoughts and ideas with growing maturity as seen through junior pupils' well-expressed limericks and sixth form pupils extensively researched and fluently written extended projects. Pupils also communicate effectively in the creative arts, such as when performing in drama, dance, and music, or when creating individualised art. In all of these areas, a strong contributory factor is the commitment of the school's leadership team and the staff as a whole to give pupils every opportunity to engage in discussions, to write creatively and to speak in public.
- 3.8 Pupils make rapid progress over time, including for different groups, such as pupils with SEND, as evidenced by their results at GCSE. Pupils have high expectations of themselves and, from the earliest years, their progress is facilitated by a focus on inquiry which has been introduced by leadership and governance to strengthen independent learning. Pupils' performance in lessons and the increase in the quality of their work in books over time demonstrate that pupils make excellent progress. This is particularly true for pupils with SEND as a result of the individual tailored support that they receive from the school. In the years 2017 to 2019, results at GCSE have been above the national average for maintained schools, and also above the national average for maintained selective schools. Results at A level have been above the national average for maintained schools, and results in International Baccalaureate examinations have been higher than the worldwide norms. In 2019, at GCSE, 69% of entries were awarded grades 7 to 9 with 44% of entries at A level awarded at A or A*. The average International Baccalaureate Diploma score in 2019 was in excess of 34. As a result, a very large majority of pupils are successful in securing their first choice of course at university. In discussion and in their responses to the questionnaire, pupils were keen to point to the quality of the teaching and the support they receive from their teachers as key contributory factors to their academic success.
- 3.9 The pupils' well-developed numeracy skills are reflected in the high standards achieved in GCSE and A-level examinations and in the high quality of work observed in lessons. For example, in a junior school club, pupils applied their excellent mathematical skills when producing creative and aesthetically pleasing pieces of art work using curves of pursuit and cardioids. And in a sixth form music lesson pupils showed great mathematical expertise when building a piece with complex rhythmic structure across a range of instruments.
- 3.10 Pupils' competence in using ICT to support their learning is outstanding. Since the previous inspection the school has implemented its objective to embed the use of technology within the curriculum, and enables pupils throughout the school to use devices to enhance their learning. When researching, pupils now switch seamlessly between tablet computers and traditional resources. Pupils commented that using a tablet computer enables them to organise and store their work with ease, collaborate with their peers and with teachers. During the inspection pupils displayed exceptional ICT skills, as seen when lower school pupils attempted coding challenges as a part of a national competition and in an A-level music lesson where pupils made rapid progress with composition when using score writing software. Pupils with SEND make excellent use of specific software to enhance their learning experience and enable themselves to make rapid progress.
- 3.11 Throughout the school, pupils achieve excellent standards in a wide array of co-curricular activities and pursuits. They have gained considerable success in sport, music, speech and drama and academic

competitions, partly because leaders, governors and staff encourage them to pursue their interests to the highest level. Pupils regularly achieve strong success at county, national and international level in a variety of sports including netball, rounders, lacrosse, tennis and swimming. Pupils excel in Olympiad competitions in mathematics and science. Other individual honours include a top blog on the invisible importance of tears, success in a wicked writing competition, runner up in the National Big Bang Fair for work on heart medications and first prize in the Cambridge University Geographical essay competition. Pupils gain strong success in external speech and drama, dance and music examinations, and outstanding artistic achievement is evident in the quality of the artwork on display throughout the school.

- 3.12 Pupils' thinking skills are extremely well-developed through wide-ranging opportunities to extend their learning. This confirms the leaders' effective response to the previous inspection, to include more intellectual challenge in lessons. From the youngest years, pupils apply thinking skills effectively and with confidence because they are encouraged to extend their understanding through open questions and with tasks where they can test their hypotheses. For example, in a junior school science lesson, pupils showed intellectual maturity as they reflected on their hypotheses about the best materials to make parachutes from. Pupils display an excellent understanding of how to research effectively using a wide range of academic sources. This is because they are taught how to assess validity and reliability and are allowed to learn from their mistakes, which they do well. The pupils' strong ability to analyse, hypothesise and synthesise is evident through subject-specific tasks such as synthesising complex and varying viewpoints on current affairs through the analysis of language in A-level English, critical evaluation of a new product in GCSE design and technology and analysis of the relationship between earthquakes and tectonic plates in lower school geography.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of community and identity as a school. The extent to which they respect and value diversity is excellent. In questionnaire responses, an overwhelming majority of parents and most pupils said that the school actively promotes the values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people, and in interviews it was clear that pupils are very accepting of each other. Pupils demonstrate an excellent level of respect for one another, regardless of any perceived difference, as exhibited during observations of and interviews with different groups. Pupils appreciate others from different backgrounds to their own, relishing opportunities to learn about and understand different cultures. For example, sixth form pupils demonstrated a nuanced and mature understanding when exploring different media reactions to members of the Royal family with very diverse backgrounds.
- 3.15 Pupils show a strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of life through the obvious pleasure they get from their learning and the care they show for the environment in which they live. They display a pronounced sense of awe and wonder in the simplest things, as demonstrated when pupils recorded the wind and realised that they could also hear birdsong. Pupils exhibit a mature aesthetic awareness and appreciation of the arts, as seen through the high-quality portraiture on display throughout the school. A deep sense of spirituality was evident when lower school pupils left messages of hope in response to a sculpture portraying light after the darkness of the Holocaust.
- 3.16 Pupils' moral awareness and social development are excellent. Their respectful behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, illustrates their strong moral values. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors passionately voiced the belief that the school is a happy community built on kindness and consideration, where pupils are respectful of the right of others to hold different opinions to their own. Pupils reflect upon their actions, are compassionate and show a firm commitment to restorative justice, as seen when junior school pupils explained how they would put things right if they had upset a friend. In discussions with pupils, a high level of understanding and their own moral compass was

evident as they discussed what influenced them to be good citizens. Most parents and pupils who responded to the questionnaire said that the school helps pupils to develop strong teamwork and social skills. This is borne out by inspection evidence. Pupils' excellent social awareness is conveyed in the ease with which they talk to and interact with adults and in their positive engagement with others in lessons and activities.

- 3.17 Pupils are extremely good at working collaboratively to benefit others, and to make a very positive contribution to both the life of the school community and to wider society. Pupils contribute to the school community in many different ways through the taking on of leadership roles, for example, as members of the head pupils' team and playground buddies in the junior school, as a part of the pupils' leadership group and through the leadership of societies in the senior school. Pupils have excellent teamwork skills which are particularly evident amongst sports teams. For example, senior netball players work together to improve their skills whether or not they are in the lead in a match, and junior pupils encouraged each other as they perfected their swimming strokes. Pupils also work extremely well together in a wide range of group activities which include, rehearsing for house drama productions, planning The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme expeditions and working in teams to solve academic challenges. Pupils demonstrate a deep sense of responsibility and are extremely active in their community involvement, with large numbers raising money for charities, visiting care homes and working with children from different parts of the community. Pupils demonstrate a desire to make life better for others, such as when senior pupils, unprompted, posted anonymous notes on lockers with positive and encouraging messages for other pupils and staff, and when junior pupils visited a local care home to make St Valentine Day cards with the residents.
- 3.18 Pupils show an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and are aware of the need to establish a balance in all they do to stay physically and mentally healthy. In discussions, pupils in the junior school explained how mindfulness club boosts their self-confidence and senior pupils described with clarity how they avoid putting themselves into dangerous situations when outside school. Pupils have a strong understanding of how to stay safe online, which is due to the successful implementation of the school's e-safety programme for all year groups. In interviews, pupils clearly and confidently explained the techniques that they use to help them to decide whether a website or communication is safe, and almost all pupils who responded to the questionnaire said that they knew how to stay safe when online. Pupils have a clear awareness of mental and emotional well-being. During discussions, senior pupils described how, with the support of the school, they had used physical exercise or involvement in charitable initiatives to improve their mental health. Since the previous inspection the governing body has been influential in providing support for well-being and mental health by appointing a full-time counsellor and acquiring a therapy dog. Pupils recognise the importance of staying physically healthy. For example, senior pupils discussed how they keep fit by using the fitness gym and lower school pupils, who were not all keen swimmers, showed a keen understanding of the benefits of swimming. In the questionnaires, a few pupils disagreed that the school encourages them to follow a healthy lifestyle. In interviews, pupils showed an appreciation of the benefits of a healthy diet, but some said that in practice they did not always make well-informed dietary decisions.
- 3.19 Pupils demonstrate an excellent level of self-understanding and a willingness to embrace new challenges with confidence. This is as a result of leaders' and governors' drive to ensure that teaching supports learning with clear planning, high expectations and the encouragement to see setbacks as an opportunity to learn, thus fulfilling another of the school's aims. This was evident during junior form time when pupils reflected on, and made positive comments about, the difficulties that they had experienced when making replica models. Such an attitude was also seen when sixth form pupils constructed reflective statements for their reports, including about challenges that they had encountered and what they had learnt from them. Pupils display outstanding levels of self-confidence and self-discipline, readily sharing ideas and opinions. Lower school pupils spoke enthusiastically about their rapid growth in confidence through participation in speech and drama. Similarly, sixth form pupils discussed how their organisational skills had developed as they took on leadership roles, whilst they maintained high standards in their academic work and found time for sport and relaxation.

The pupils are able to self-reflect and offer each other constructive feedback as seen in lower school textiles folders where detailed peer assessment and self-reflection enabled pupils to improve their work. Pupils display robust self-esteem, as seen when a body conscious initiative led by the senior pupils' team had a profound effect on junior pupils' views of themselves. Pupils were firm in their acknowledgement of their teachers' roles in raising their self-belief, recognising that individual feedback and support is at the heart of their success as learners.

- 3.20 Pupils develop excellent life skills throughout every stage at the school and are fully supported with transition programmes and pastoral care. Junior school pupils discussed how lessons in the senior school prepare them well for their transition to secondary education, and senior school pupils explained how, as independent learners, they are well-prepared for university. All of the above exemplify the success of the school in meeting its aim to prepare the pupils to face, with confidence, all of the challenges and opportunities of the wider 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 form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited 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

Mrs Sue Clarke	Reporting inspector
Mr Eugene du Toit	Compliance team inspector (Headmaster, HMC school)
Mrs Pamela Hutley	Team inspector (Headmistress, ISA school)
Mr Luke Michael	Team inspector (Assistant head, HMC school)
Mr Jonathan Ricketts	Team inspector (Acting head, HMC school)
Miss Sarah Styles	Team inspector (Headmistress, IAPS school)