

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

Sutton Valence School

March 2022

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School's Details

School	Sutton Valence	School		
DfE number	886/6019			
Registered charity number	1181012			
Address	Sutton Valence North Street Sutton Valence Maidstone Kent ME17 3HL	School		
Telephone number	01622 845200			
Email address	enquiries@svs.org.uk			
Headmaster	Mr James Thomas			
Chair of governors	Mrs Gillian Swaine			
Age range	11 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	557			
	Day pupils	446	Boarders	111
	Seniors	374	Sixth Form	183
Inspection dates 8 to 11 March 2022				

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1. Background Information

About the school

1.1 Sutton Valence School is a co-educational day and boarding school. It was founded in 1576 by William Lambe and now forms part of an educational charity, the United Westminster and Grey Coat Foundation which provides the governance for the school through an advisory panel of non-proprietorial governors. Since the previous inspection, the chair of governors has changed, and a new headmaster was appointed in September 2021.

- 1.2 The school has three boarding houses on site, one for female pupils and two for male pupils. In addition, there are five houses for day pupils, one for Years 7 and 8 only and four mixed age group houses for older pupils.
- 1.3 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

What the school seeks to do

1.4 The school aims to help pupils to become confident, civilised, tolerant and open-minded individuals who possess a love of learning and a strong set of values reflecting the school's principles as a Christian foundation. The school expects pupils to treat each other with respect, humanity and care, and to develop their leadership skills alongside their academic and co-curricular activities.

About the pupils

1.5 Most pupils come from UK families with a small minority of boarders coming from overseas. Nationally standardised data indicate that the ability of the senior pupils is average and, in the sixth form is below average. The school has identified 193 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and provides support for a range of learning needs including dyslexia, attention deficit disorders, emotional and mental health and physical disabilities. Four pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Twenty pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), seventeen of whom receive additional support. The school offers a range of scholarships for pupils with particular gifts and talents and the curriculum is modified to meet their needs.

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> <u>Regulations 2014</u>, <u>National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools</u>.

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 The school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2018 to 2021 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, 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.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

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

- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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, and NMS 2–4, 6–12, 15 and 16 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. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.

2.12 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

- 2.13 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. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 5 are met.

PART 6 - Provision of information

- 2.15 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.
- 2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are 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, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.
- 2.18 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

- 2.19 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. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.
- 2.20 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. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

School name	National Curriculum name
First Form	Y7
Second Form	Y8
Third Form	Y9
Fourth Form	Y10
Fifth Form	Y11
Lower Sixth Form	Y12
Upper Sixth Form	Y13

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
 - Pupils' attainment over time is excellent and their destinations as they leave school confirm their high levels of progress.
 - Pupils develop highly effective study skills as demonstrated by their successes at A level and in the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).
 - Pupils' achievements are excellent in a wide range of sporting and academic activities and in the creative and performing arts.
 - Pupils' communication skills are excellent; speaking skills are a particular strength, pupils are fluent, articulate and confident.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
 - Pupils know and understand themselves well. As they progress through the school they grow in confidence because they discover they can be successful and can improve their own performance.
 - Pupils are resilient, many persevere, some despite learning difficulties, and achieve well in their studies.
 - Pupils' moral understanding and behaviour is excellent.
 - Pupils' social development and collaboration is excellent.
 - Pupils have an excellent understanding of how they can stay safe and keep healthy.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the light of these excellent outcomes, the school may wish to consider the following:
 - Enable pupils in new and existing leadership positions to contribute more positively to the life of the school through opportunities to develop their roles and access to appropriate training.

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 enter the school with a wide range of abilities and respond quickly to the school's positive attitudes towards success in academic and other areas. With the help and support of their teachers, they begin to discover their own strengths and interests, so that a very large majority attain good or excellent results for their abilities in GCSE examinations. In 2018–2019, one third of grades attained were at levels 9 to 7 and the large majority were at level 4 or above. Pupils' progress in the sixth form is rapid. In 2018–2019, over a quarter of grades were at A or A* and pupils' progress relative to their starting points was extremely high. Centre-assessed grades in 2020 and teacher-assessed grades in 2021 show a similarly positive picture. Pupils with SEND and EAL achieve in line with their peers because the school's flexible curriculum is tailored to their strengths, and highly effective learning support staff help to ensure their progress. In the sixth form, many pupils, of a range of abilities, choose to do the EPQ and in the last four years, all pupils taking the qualification achieved at least a B grade and most achieved A or A* grades for their research. These excellent achievements allow most pupils to be successful in gaining places at the university of their choice whilst others follow their interests into a range of careers such as sport, finance, art and music.
- 3.6 Pupils demonstrate excellent knowledge and understanding in their lessons. In religious studies (RS), sixth-form pupils discussed the concept of determinism, showing a mature understanding of the concept and its impact on people's actions. In a GCSE geography lesson, pupils confidently recalled the names of international organisations and treaties linked to the management of environmental impact in a cold environment such as Alaska. Younger pupils showed a wide knowledge of the romantic poets and wrote their own poems in the same style, achieving excellent outcomes as they used a range of techniques such as alliteration and rhyme. Pupils' mathematical, technical, and scientific skills develop well, encouraged by skilled teaching and specialist learning support staff. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a very large majority of pupils said their skills and knowledge improve in most lessons. In 2021, a group of sixth-form pupils gained awards from a nationally recognised scheme for their work in science, a project on electromagnetic energy transfer earning an award at the highest level. Music, especially strings, is a strength of the school; pupils take up the many opportunities to learn instruments and sing, with some gaining places in the county youth orchestra and others going on to study music at specialist music schools and conservatoires. Performance skills in drama are similarly high, whether in lessons or in the production of whole school plays and musicals. Inspectors based near the theatre observed some thoughtful performances such a lesson where younger pupils listened to a story about a voyage as they sat as if in a ship. Each took on a different character and convincingly reacted to the story as they encountered an unknown island. Pupils develop strong artistic and technical skills in art and design technology (DT). In media studies and photography, pupils' portfolios are of a high standard.
- 3.7 Pupils say they have developed confidence in their ICT skills throughout the covid pandemic when remote learning was a necessity. The school's digital strategy has ensured that pupils and teachers naturally use laptops in many lessons, increasing the pace of learning activities and ensuring that SEND pupils with writing difficulties are not disadvantaged. These skills are well-developed in other subjects such as DT, photography and media studies where pupils were observed using sophisticated editing tools to good effect. Pupils enjoy mathematics and use their skills across a range of subjects, such as when calculating cardiac output from stroke volume and heart rate in a sixth form biology lesson. Pupils including some with SEND, demonstrated their secure mathematical understanding when

- deciding whether to round a decimal answer up or down in a calculation about break even points in business studies.
- 3.8 Pupils develop excellent study skills through the many opportunities offered to them, including the Higher Project Qualification (HPQ) in their middle years and the EPQ in the sixth form. The school does not limit these opportunities to more able pupils, requiring only that the pupil has good effort grades, and so pupils of all abilities learn to pose hypotheses, research effectively, analyse and synthesise their findings and draw appropriate conclusions. Pupils new to the school described improvements in their standard of work and, in the questionnaire, most pupils agreed that their teachers are supportive and know how to help them learn. An example was seen in a geography class where pupils worked with their teacher to gain a clear understanding of the different command words used in examination questions. Pupils say the well-structured day with regular breaks helps their concentration and progress. Boarders find that the house routines help them to develop their ability to study independently and sixth formers say that working in the houses during the day helps them revise effectively for examinations.
- 3.9 Pupils have highly positive attitudes towards their learning, fulfilling the school's aim to instil a love of learning. They are keen to pursue their studies and use lesson times effectively, often enjoying their learning as was seen in a Year 7 lesson where pupils studied the names of animals in French, working on the pronunciation and the noises that the animals made. Pupils have a strong rapport with their teachers, and they cooperate readily with each other, moving seamlessly into group work and back to individual study. Older pupils readily take responsibility for their own learning as was seen in sixth-form lessons; pupils worked independently whether studying different musical traditions in the Hispanic world, or when preparing their A-level photography portfolios, developing their creative ideas with initiative and imagination.
- 3.10 Pupil's communication skills are a strength of the school. Pupils of all ages are fluent, articulate and confident whether talking to each other, or conversing with adults in school. Pupils develop excellent public speaking skills as they have many opportunities to practise, whether at the Model United Nations meetings or in the school's debating teams. Boarders rapidly develop their language skills as they practise their English extensively in formal and informal situations. Pupils are good listeners, they are attentive in class and are respectful in listening to others, waiting for their turn to speak. Their writing develops well over time and, although correct spelling is an issue for some pupils, pupils write fluently as evidenced by their articles in the school magazine describing school trips, Combined Cadet Force (CCF) activities, charity events and musical performances. These skills are all well supported by the excellent library where pupils can read, research and study, listen to someone reading a story, or match the elves on the shelves to answer a quiz about authors' names.
- 3.11 Pupil's achievements range beyond their academic studies in response to the school's inclusive approach that rewards leadership and achievement at all levels. They engage readily and successfully with the extensive and diverse range of activities on offer and value the many opportunities to take part in competitions, matches and performances. Sport is a strength of the school, and two-thirds of the pupils participate in weekend and mid-week fixtures. This year, the senior boys' rugby team has reached the national *Vase* final at Twickenham with the whole school in attendance supporting them. The U18 boy's hockey team reached the national hockey semi-final and the U14 girls' hockey team has reached the regional final; pupils are nationally represented in individual sports such as skiing, shooting and riding. Sports scholars benefit from structured training and fitness programmes because the Foundation has invested in high-quality facilities for athletes. Pupils enjoy success in many competitions related to their academic studies; for example, a sixth-form pupil won the regional heat of the Historical Society Great Debate and a team from Year 12 has recently won the Institute of Economic Affairs Budget competition.
- 3.12 Many pupils play musical instruments or sing, and they achieve considerable success in national music examinations, with some pupils each year reaching the highest grades. The quality of their performance is high, music, especially strings, is a strength of the school; pupils take up the many

opportunities to learn instruments and sing, with some gaining places in the county youth orchestra and others going on to study music at specialist music schools and conservatoires. Pupils take part successfully in the school's two major drama productions each year whether on stage or as part of the technical crew, and pupils studying GCSE and A-level art and photography exhibit their excellent work on the school's website. The school aims to develop leadership skills, and these are promoted strongly by the school's excellent CCF, and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme, which has a strong uptake and a high completion rate with several pupils achieving the highest gold award every year.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem because the school's bespoke curriculum enables each pupil to work to their strengths and the wide range of options and activities ensures that everyone can find an area in which they can succeed. In the questionnaire, almost all parents agreed that the school helps pupils to become confident and independent. Once pupils develop this confidence they demonstrate strong resilience in their studies, persevering through difficulties and working hard to improve their performance whether on the sports field or in their academic studies. Some overseas boarders explained how they had become much more self-reliant in the supportive environment of the boarding houses, and pupils with SEND described struggling with low grades for coursework but seeing their grades rise after being encouraged to persevere. Pupils of all abilities develop an excellent sense of self-worth over time, becoming confident and articulate young adults who are nonetheless modest and respectful of others' views in fulfilment of the school's aim to treat others with respect, humanity and care.
- 3.15 Pupils naturally respect others who may be different from themselves within the school and beyond. The boarding community welcomes pupils from a number of countries and all pupils value the opportunity to learn about different cultures and traditions. In the questionnaire, most parents and a large majority of pupils agreed that pupils are kind and respect each other. Some female pupils expressed a view that, despite posters around the school, more could be done to promote diversity. A recently formed team for inclusion, diversity and equality foundered during the pandemic; the inspection team found little evidence of disrespect or intolerance but agreed that the initiative had lapsed.
- 3.16 Pupils make well-informed subject choices and make decisions about their futures with confidence because they trust staff to advise them wisely. This process starts early as younger pupils enthusiastically choose activities in the weekly co-curricular activity session. Pupils initiate many charitable funding-raising events, and the food committee makes decisions about healthy options and advises the catering department. Pupils with SEND explained how they chose whether to take learning support as an option or to continue with an extra subject as they approached GCSEs, saying they were clear about the implications before making the choice. Some sixth-form pupils choose to study level 3 BTEC in public services which builds on their experience in the CCF, and pupils planning their next steps find careers support and guidance enables them to make appropriate decisions about whether to go to university or to specialise in a career of their choice.
- 3.17 Pupils respond strongly to the non-material aspects of life in many ways. Several were clearly moved by special events in school such as the carol services and the Remembrance Day service held on the lawns in front of the main building, and several pupils said the weekly chapel service allowed them time to pause and reflect. Pupils find meaning in their studies; some said they were moved by poetry in English and responded by writing their own verses, and other pupils said their poetry was in response to the beauty of the school grounds. In a middle school RS lesson, an excellent example of spiritual awareness was observed as pupils gave a mature response to existential questions during a wide-ranging debate. Pupils often express their feelings eloquently by participating in, or watching, a drama or music production, or by creating sensitive works in art, photography or media studies.

- 3.18 Almost all pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and respect school rules so that, even if they break them, they accept the appropriate sanction gracefully. Pupils respond to the clear expectations of school leaders because staff model appropriate behaviour and support pupils when things go wrong. Pupils are responsible and generally respect those around them, and many are prepared to challenge behaviour they consider to be wrong. Older pupils in the houses and in school set themselves high standards and have a strong sense of responsibility towards younger pupils, an excellent example being pupil leaders in the CCF who are responsible for setting the standards for younger recruits. In the questionnaire, most parents said the school takes bullying seriously and actively promotes good behaviour and almost all pupils said the school expects them to behave well.
- 3.19 Pupils' social development is excellent and the vast majority of parents who answered the questionnaire said the school helps their children to develop strong teamwork and social skills. Pupils cooperate readily with each other in school and in the boarding houses where relationships are generally harmonious. Pupils with SEND quicky develop the social skills they need and are assimilated into school life. Pupils work most effectively with each other on the sports fields and in the challenges posed by the junior leadership course, CCF field days and the DofE expeditions, where teamwork and cooperation are essential for success. In lessons, pupils readily solve problems in small groups, as seen in a mathematics class where pupils prepared to deliver an assembly on estimating the number of smarties in a tube. The class organised themselves efficiently into groups and agreed on the roles that each would play. Sixth-form pupils demonstrated excellent self-awareness and social understanding in a psychology class discussion about face-to-face and online communication. Pupils work together to produce performances of a high standard in school music and drama events. Pupils in the middle years have formed their own band, sixth formers offered to play a rock song in assembly and major school productions and concerts testify to the pupils' ability to work together successfully to the benefit of all.
- 3.20 Many pupils want to contribute to their school community and are proud to accept leadership positions. Heads of boarding houses take their responsibilities seriously and enjoy arranging events and activities for younger boarders, and house prefects help with prep duties and mentor younger members of the house. Many boarders take part in a weekly volunteer programme and during the recent pandemic, some helped local people with shopping. Members of the student council take on the responsibility of representing pupils' views to the staff, and pupils on the junior leadership programme undertake useful jobs in the community such as litter picking and gardening at a local cemetery. Pupils are acutely aware of the needs of the wider community; they take on voluntary jobs and work hard to raise funds for their selected charities, the local hospital and a school in Nepal. During the pandemic, several pupils created their own challenges to raise funds for a particular cause and others used online platforms to read poems to residents at a local care home. The role of school prefect is an important one and prefects say they feel proud to represent their school, especially when showing prospective parents around on open mornings when they feel entrusted with a responsible role. However, much of the prefect role in school is prescribed, and some felt that they would like more discussion about it with staff and, although they felt they had performed their duties well, they would have appreciated more training for some aspects of it.
- 3.21 Pupils have excellent attitudes towards their physical health and are acutely aware of the importance of maintaining their mental health. Pupils make full use of the sports facilities and fitness opportunities in school and are conscious of the need to look after themselves by eating and sleeping well and avoiding unnecessarily harmful lifestyles. The school supports them in this by providing good quality, healthy meals, comfortable accommodation and medical facilities. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and in situations outside school as the school delivers a comprehensive personal, social and health education programme. In the questionnaire, a very large majority of pupils said the school encourages them to be healthy.

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4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair and other governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Catherine Williamson Reporting inspector

Mrs Sue Clifford Compliance team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)

Ms Wendy Martin Team inspector for boarding (Former head, SofH school)

Mr Andrew Johnson Team inspector (Head, HMC school)

Mr Julius Sidwell Team inspector (Vice principal, HMC school)