



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Regulatory Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report
For Schools with Residential Provision**

Tonbridge School

November 2021

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School's Details

School	Tonbridge School			
DfE number	886/6020			
Registered charity number	1097977			
Address	Tonbridge School High Street Tonbridge Kent TN9 1JP			
Telephone number	01732 365555			
Email address	hmsec@tonbridge-school.org			
Headmaster	Mr James Priory			
Chair of governors	Mr Robert Elliott			
Age range	13 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	800			
	Day pupils	343	Boarders	457
	Seniors	474	Sixth Form	326
Inspection dates	9 to 12 November 2021			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Tonbridge School is an independent boarding and day school registered for male pupils. Dating from 1553, it achieved charitable company status in 2003, with governors appointed by the Worshipful Company of Skinners forming a majority on the school's board. The trustees of the charitable company exercise proprietorial functions. The school occupies a 150-acre site on the northern edge of the town of Tonbridge. There are seven boarding houses and five day houses for the day pupils.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has opened a new science block, refurbished several academic areas, boarding and day houses, and has introduced a new sixth-form curriculum. In September 2021, the school merged with a preparatory school for male pupils in Sevenoaks, which has retained a separate DfE registration.
- 1.3 During the period March to August 2020, the whole school remained open only for vulnerable pupils or the children of key workers. A number of boarders continued to be accommodated 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 vulnerable pupils or the children of key workers 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 and teacher-assessed grades were awarded.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.8 The school aims to provide a caring and enlightened environment in which the talents of each individual pupil flourish. It strives for academic and pastoral excellence, co-curricular breadth and depth, and to develop a heightened sense of individual and collective social responsibility.

About the pupils

- 1.9 Pupils come from a range of professional and business backgrounds. Most day pupils live in towns and villages near Tonbridge, whilst boarders predominantly live within 90 minutes' travel time from Tonbridge, including London, or sometimes overseas. Data provided by the school indicate the ability of pupils is above average compared with those who take the same tests nationally. The school has identified 116 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), such as dyslexia, 86 of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil has an education, health and care plan. The school has identified 103 pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL), 33 of whom receive individual support for their English.

About the inspection

For this inspection, the DfE requested a particular focus on ISSR Part 1 (curriculum, relationships and sex education, teaching and assessment), Part 2 (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development) and Part 3

(welfare, health and safety) and related NMS to ensure that pupils are safeguarded effectively, that the quality of education provided fosters a culture of positive relationships and respect for protected characteristics, and that the school implements a curriculum for relationships and sex education which meets the requirements of the statutory guidance.

Details relating to this particular focus can be found at the end of the Regulatory Compliance section under the heading 'Additional information on particular areas of focus' beginning on page 9.

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 REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards, including the boarding NMS. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

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: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) 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 2020 and 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 and 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, 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 [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. 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, 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

- 2.12 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.
- 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.**

Additional information on particular areas of focus

Quality of education provided – curriculum [ISSR Part 1, paragraph 2; NMS 10] and relationships and sex education [ISSR Part 1, paragraph 2A]

- 2.22 The personal, health and social education (PHSE) curriculum effectively reflects the school's aims and ethos and encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Equality Act. The curriculum, which includes relationships and sex education (RSE), is successfully implemented. In line with statutory guidance there is a planned programme, with topics being covered at an appropriate age and ability level. In the current year, the programme is delivered in a range of ways. Years 9 and 10 have separate designated lessons, supplemented by lectures, whereas Years 11 and 12 have regular lectures, followed by discussion in houses. Housemasters and matrons attend lectures and have been effectively prepared for discussions and, as required by the guidance, to deal with difficult issues and questions. Year 13 have a three-day seminar with integrated opportunities for discussions. A new approach has been agreed so that, from September 2022, all PHSE, which will include RSE, will be taught as part of the main curriculum.
- 2.23 The policy for relationships and sex education is available to parents on the school's website, and the school has consulted parents, pupils, staff and governors and taken their views into consideration. The scheme of work allows pupils to develop their understanding in this area and is sufficiently flexible to respond to any current issues. There has been an increased focus on mutual respect and tolerance between those of different genders. In the context of the issues reported, the school's PHSE and RSE programmes have been further enhanced by assemblies, discussion with school councils, additional workshops and seminars run by professionals on the subjects of equality, everyday sexism and other related areas. Many of these focused on behaviour out of school, especially at weekend parties. Pupils have led talks in the school chapel on issues related to masculinity, responsible behaviour and positive relationships. The plans to integrate PHSE and RSE into the curriculum have been accelerated.
- 2.24 Regular feedback on the effectiveness of the programme is sought from pupils. In discussions, pupils expressed their full support for the increased focus and arrangements. In the pre-inspection questionnaires a very small minority of pupils responded that pupils can be unkind or disrespectful to each other, and a very few gave examples, but the vast majority affirmed that they can approach adults and that the school sorts out poor behaviour, a view supported by inspection evidence.

Quality of education provided – teaching [ISSR Part 1, paragraph 3]

- 2.25 Teaching shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of PHSE and RSE programmes. Pupils are involved in the content but seek to use their own experience to further plan the content and delivery of the programme. Teaching does not undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs; nor discriminate against pupils contrary to Part 6 of the Equality Act 2010.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [ISSR Part 2, paragraph 5; NMS 17]

- 2.26 The school's culture actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. In the context of the visit, it is highly successful in enabling pupils to develop their self-knowledge, to distinguish between right and wrong: it encourages pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, and to show initiative and respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act. In particular, the school has taken specific, successful steps to address the issues highlighted in reports in the media.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 11]

- 2.27 The school's safeguarding policy and arrangements meet the requirements of statutory guidance and are implemented effectively. They are supplemented by additional policies which outline the code of conduct for staff, whistleblowing, e-safety, and safer recruitment of staff. Records of safeguarding incidents frequently cross refer to particular paragraphs in statutory guidance.
- 2.28 The school keeps records and analyses instances of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, to identify patterns and intervene early to prevent abuse. Records show clear and timely action and immediate liaison with appropriate local safeguarding partners. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and other pastoral leaders are aware of the range of support available to children and young people who are victims or who perpetrate harmful sexual behaviour, and when appropriate such support is activated. Incidents of harmful sexual behaviour by pupils are dealt with appropriately and recorded effectively. There is a culture of referral of concerns at all levels amongst staff and pupils. Senior pupils have received safeguarding training, and the training for all staff and DSLs is up to date and in line with local expectations. Staff and governors have been trained effectively to understand, identify and how to respond to sexual harassment, sexual violence, including online sexual abuse; and peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – behaviour [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 9; NMS 12] and bullying [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 10; NMS 12]

- 2.29 Evidence from questionnaires, discussions with pupils, and other documentation supplied shows that there is little bullying in the school, but when it does occur it is dealt with effectively. The behaviour policy follows non-statutory guidance, and the approach, which includes the implementation of effective sanctions if appropriate, reinforces a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 13]

- 2.30 The school's leadership has made a detailed and far-reaching response to concerns that have been raised. It has liaised effectively with local safeguarding partners and reported any allegations to police. It has communicated to good effect with the school community: pupils, parents, alumni and staff. The pastoral committee of the governors held an extraordinary meeting to plan the next steps in responding to the issues identified and, for the pupils, held a special series of assemblies followed by small group discussions in houses and tutor groups.
- 2.31 The school has engaged with local girls' schools at senior leadership, DSL, pastoral staff and senior pupil level. Senior pupils from one of the girls' schools have addressed the lower school council and anti-bullying council at the school, and there have been shared academic and social activities between boarding houses. The RSE programme has been recirculated to parents following the issues reported and there have been online seminars to introduce parents to the programme and to raise parents' digital awareness.

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:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Novi	Year 9
Year 2	Year 10
Year 3	Year 11
Year 4	Year 12
Year 5	Year 13

Key findings

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

- Pupils have exceptional communication skills, writing and speaking with sophisticated vocabulary, structure and passion.
- Pupils have a high level of skills, knowledge and understanding in mathematics, science, linguistics, technology, sport and the creative arts, and consequently achieve excellent results in public examinations and national competitions.
- Pupils' attitudes to work are exceptional; collaboration is the pupils' default approach to learning and co-curricular activity and it supports their shared thirst for intellectual challenge.

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

- Pupils have a strong self-awareness and a sense of their place in the school, local community and the wider world.
- Pupils have a highly developed moral and social awareness; they are keen to confront, be involved with, and take leadership in addressing current social issues, particularly those to do with respect for others.
- Pupils have a strong record of support for other pupils and the local community, and recognise the high quality of boarding provision as a major contribution to their personal development.

Recommendation

3.3 In the context of the pupils' high level of communication skills and the school's achievement of its aim to develop social responsibility, the school should:

- Recognise the potential of pupils to take greater leadership in the school's current RSE initiatives.

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' attainment at A level was consistently high during the years 2017–2019, with well over two-thirds of results achieving an A* or A, or top grade in the Pre-U examinations. Results of the centre and teacher-assessed grades in 2020 and 2021 showed improvement on this already strong base, with well over four-fifths of results being achieved at one of the top grades, and nearly two-thirds at A* or equivalent. This very high level of attainment is a consequence of the pupils' exceptional attitudes to learning, supported by teaching which shows a high level of subject knowledge combined with exceptional learning resources. In discussion, pupils said they feel well prepared academically and socially for the next stage in their education. Almost all achieve offers of places at universities in the UK and worldwide, or in art and music colleges, many of which have very highly selective entry requirements. Pupils spoke positively of the careers programme and the support given for university entrance. The four distinct academic pathways introduced by the leadership in the sixth form enables pupils to focus on and almost always achieve demanding targets that recognise their ability and aspiration. In particular, pupils demonstrate excellent levels of research and consequently high grades in the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).
- 3.6 Results in GCSE are equally indicative of the extremely high quality of learning and teaching. During the three-year period to 2019, the majority of results were at the highest two grades. In 2020 and 2021, in the centre- and teacher-assessed assessments, two-thirds of results were graded at the very highest level. On entry, almost all pupils have an ability well above, and in many cases far above others taking similar ability tests nationally. Data analysed show that, even from this very high starting point, at both GCSE and A level, almost all pupils achieve significantly higher examination grades than expected. This represents rapid progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school. Pupils with SEND make progress in line with their peers. In their responses to pre-inspection questionnaires, which were overwhelmingly positive about every aspect of the school, including the quality of governance and leadership, the vast majority of parents stated that their child's individual educational needs are met effectively. Pupils spoke of the value and style of the support they are given for any specific educational difficulty, for example dyslexia, but some reported that teaching in lessons is not always adjusted to their needs. The school's leadership has already identified this as a focus for staff professional development. Data show that over both the GCSE and A-level years, progress made by pupils with EAL is marginally more rapid than their contemporaries, and this group is well represented in the top quartile of final results. In teaching across the curriculum, it was apparent that nuanced language was no block to these pupils' understanding. For example, they were able to accurately explain the difference between perfectly and relatively inelastic demand in economics.
- 3.7 Pupils have exceptional skills, knowledge and understanding for their age. They manipulate word and number with equal flair. In written work, sixth-form pupils demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the poet Horace's use of stylistic devices such as enjambment, inclusive verbs and the jussive subjunctive to maintain engagement. In classics, they drew their own ideas from subtlety of text in the writings of Tacitus. Pupils show a strong conceptual understanding which moves them beyond the facts, often as a result of adroit prompts from teachers. For example, quickly identifying the complex interdependence of political pressures in American politics. Pupils seize the opportunity provided by the governors' investment in a forward-looking science centre to display and develop good practical skills. Exceptional resources allow teaching to include experimental work in most science lessons, and as a result pupils develop a first-hand understanding of physical laws. Pupils have a consistently strong record in international and national science Olympiads, including a top ten place in a worldwide physics competition.
- 3.8 Pupils show their creative potential in a range of areas. They regularly are awarded Arkwright scholarships to study engineering and are highly placed in national engineering competitions. Work completed as part of design and digital creativity courses shows innovation and independence. Pupils

use information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons both supportively and creatively, often selecting their own software. Musicians perform with expression on a wide range of instruments, including voice, and many achieve distinctions in the highest grades in external music examinations. Despite the high standards achieved in both music and drama, pupils recognise these arts are not for a talented elite, singing with enthusiasm in Chapel and citing house competitions as an opportunity to participate in their own chosen genres. The rich variety and high quality of pupils' art is ubiquitous around the school. In lessons, pupils develop strong creative ideas against a backcloth of teaching that embeds skills but allows originality. Pupils were keen to describe the influence of the school's architecture in their photographic creations, or in a series of gesso-based charcoal drawings. Individual pupils and school teams achieve at an extremely high level in sport, regularly winning national titles. Many pupils were keen to stress that credibility and respect are not earned only through sporting success, and over one-third of pupils opt out of major team games to follow another activity of the vast range on offer.

- 3.9 Pupils are exceptional mathematicians, effortlessly and accurately applying numerical techniques in a wide range of subjects. For example, in using logarithmic skills at the start of a GCSE course pupils were accurate and in calculating the relative advantages of ISAs, shares or bonds. The youngest pupils worked confidently through a series of progressively more difficult questions on fractions. Over the next two years in the school, pupils cement both skills and a love of the subject. Almost two-thirds of pupils study mathematics in the sixth form, where they show a high level of achievement. In a lesson reviewing the senior mathematics Olympiad, sixth-form pupils enthusiastically shared their different approaches in a shared quest for the most elegant solutions. They confidently took for granted the correctness of their answers and developed powers of mathematical argument through the preparedness of teaching to allow high ability pupils to take the lead in their learning, and to move beyond the already demanding further mathematics specification. Pupils have an outstanding record in mathematics Olympiads, with individuals often finishing in the top few in the country: many proceed to study mathematics or allied subjects at university.
- 3.10 In much else that is exceptional, pupils' communication skills stand out. They write persuasively and with expression, drawing on their studies of English, modern and classical languages to choose apposite vocabulary. Pupils identified the library as a place central to their academic lives, describing with enthusiasm the opportunities provided by the school for formal reading sessions. In both lessons and in discussions with inspectors, pupils were confident and engaging, communicating effectively with a mixture of narrative and reason. Often they draw on their own experience, and always clarify whether their hypotheses are based on example or conjecture. They allow conversations to flow without interruption, answering open questions succinctly.
- 3.11 Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that in Year 9 pupils, from varying previous experience, quickly develop critical and analytical skills in their approach to study. In GCSE physics, pupils analysed results in a Snell's Law experiment and reasoned the change in speed and wavelength well. Pupils of the same age analytically harmonised a melody, using their previous knowledge to achieve a range of solutions. By the time they reach the sixth form, pupils' skills are well honed and EPQs reflect an advanced sense of enquiry and the ability to synthesise material, evaluate sources, and make sound conclusions.
- 3.12 The pupils' strong attitudes to learning are a key factor in their high levels of achievement. These attitudes are underpinned by an autonomy that allows pupils choice in selecting from the opportunities for intellectual and physical stimulation provided through a wide range of societies, lectures and trips. Collaboration is the *de facto* approach to learning. In questionnaire responses from pupils and parents, all parents agreed that the school equips pupils with the team working, collaborative and research skills they need in later life.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils show a very strong awareness of themselves, their place in the history of the school and its impact on their future. In discussion, several pupils described their own development in the context of former pupils who died in the world wars, or who became renowned in science, literature, music and drama. That ability to reflect pervades their approach. Inspectors identified a self-confidence and lack of arrogance as common traits in the character of the school's pupils. Pupils share an urge to improve, academically, in sport, music, and in their approach to life. Pupils described a school culture in which hard work is respected and never ridiculed, a view that is supported by observations of their attitudes in lessons, attendance at voluntary societies and lectures and scrutiny of their written work. In their questionnaire responses, a very small minority of pupils disagreed that pupils are kind and respect each other, the very large majority affirmed that the school dealt effectively with any behavioural or bullying issues that occur. In discussion, they forcefully argued that there was very little bullying in the school and articulated that the use of derogatory language is unacceptable in any circumstances. In the context of behavioural issues identified in the media, pupils discussed their role as young males in their attitudes to females with clarity. Even though almost all identified as not having experience of the issues described, they reported that they understood and supported the strong practical response exhibited by senior pupils and school leaders.
- 3.15 Pupils are well prepared to make firm decisions, drawing on evidence, weighing opinion, and deciding on action. They are unafraid to tackle difficult issues. Their confidence emanates from a culture which encourages pupils to make informed choices from an early stage, whether in subject choices, selecting the medium in which to work, or how and when to use ICT to support their learning. Activities which require decision making, such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) and the combined cadet force (CCF) are well supported, and pupils are routinely successful in respectively gaining gold and silver awards or winning regional competitions. Pupils understand that in a busy boarding environment their well-being requires them to select which of the myriad opportunities to take up, and which to decline.
- 3.16 Pupils have a perceptive awareness of non-material aspects of life. Some pupils have a sound theological understanding. Pupils wrote knowledgeably about the way the signs identified in John's Gospel confirm the status of Jesus and provided critical insight in comparison with other figures within Judaism and Christianity who performed similar signs. For many, chapel services sustain their spiritual belief, although in the questionnaires a very small minority questioned the impact of compulsory Sunday services on the balance of their week. Pupils spoke of the unexpected uplift they sometimes can feel, many citing the architectural environment in which they learn. Others were able to recognise the positive impact on their own well-being of listening to the orchestra, walking to games through the autumn leaves, or studying science under giant photographs from the galaxy.
- 3.17 Pupils are able to objectively consider argument and counter-argument, and hence develop a mature moral awareness. From an early age they are keen to debate moral issues in lessons, for example COVID restrictions or the congestion charge. During the inspection, pupils listened attentively to an informative speech on the lessons learned from troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, then in subsequent conversations not only debated potential political bias but determined to research further some of the claims made. Written work shows a similar appetite for resolving contrasting opinion, and for coming to informed conclusion. Writing in EPQ essays exemplifies this, such as in writing about the way in which Russell linked Kant's challenging criticism to linguistic interpretation and provided a sound counter-argument. A-level pupils show sophisticated moral awareness identifying how Homer's style emphasises the unjust nature of Agamemnon's behaviour. Sixth-form politics pupils skilfully compared moral arguments for the existence and efficacy of pressure groups or the increasing power of the executive during the COVID pandemic. Pupils relish societies and groups that freely debate and address equality issues. For example, around respect for those of different race, sex, or gender. Many boarders spoke enthusiastically about the impact on their understanding of different viewpoints of

the twinning scheme with boarding houses at a local girls' school. Pupils show good sense, perspective and pragmatism, and a desire to further take the lead in addressing some of the behavioural issues recently raised.

- 3.18 Pupils engage enthusiastically with others in school and the local community. Their readiness to collaborate in lessons is reflected in the approach to all aspects of school life. They show a dual loyalty to school and house, reflecting an ethos that encourages cohesion. Boarders identified that they feel most comfortable discussing difficult issues in their houses due to the positive support they receive from both staff and other boarders in a limited environment where they feel well known. In this way boarding plays a key role in pupils' rapid social development. Although some activity has been curtailed by COVID-19, documentary evidence and information from senior pupils substantiates the pupils' widespread and effective involvement in school and community life. Staff involvement in such activities is as light touch as appropriate, allowing pupils to innovate and take leadership. Senior pupils referred to work with senior pupils at the nearest girls' school, school councils, as house 'buddies', as positive opportunities to change attitudes. Charitable fundraising for projects chosen by pupils, most recently through the school's 'Giving Day' makes a strong contribution to the community. Over a hundred pupils both contribute to others', and in parallel develop their own social skills, through the school's community action programme which covers most areas of the town. In this way, the school more than satisfies an objective for its pupils to develop a heightened sense of individual and collective social responsibility.
- 3.19 Pupils agree that this is a school where pupils can be comfortable in their differences. In response to the questionnaire, almost all parents replied that the school treats children fairly, regardless of their sex, faith, race or needs. Although a small minority of pupils in the questionnaires said the school does not help them in their friendships, in discussion all responded that they had disagreed with that statement as friendships flourished without school intervention. Pupils consider that there is a recognition within the school that different experiences are as valid as any other experiences and that the variety of backgrounds and cultures within the school contribute to their personal development.
- 3.20 Pupils make excellent use of the opportunities of an extensive co-curricular provision to pursue a healthy lifestyle. They relish physical exercise, whether through formal games or their own choice of activity. Cookery sessions have further raised their understanding of healthy eating. In questionnaire responses that were almost without exception extremely positive about boarding and life in the day houses, a small minority of pupils identified the need for changes in food. The school had already introduced improvements to the quality of food before the start of the inspection. Pupils have a good sense of the need to keep mentally healthy, further reinforced by the current revision of the PSHE programme. Under pressure or feeling anxious they quickly seek the support of both house staff and mental health professionals.

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 governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended chapel. 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 Stephen Cole	Reporting inspector
Mrs Sue Duff	Accompanying Reporting inspector
Mrs Jane Prescott	Compliance team inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mrs Gillian Bilbo	Team inspector (Former head, GSA school)
Mr Tim Dewes	Team inspector (Former deputy head, HMC school)
Mrs Diane Durrant	Team inspector (Former head, SofH school)
Mrs Wendy Martin	Team inspector (Former head, ISA school)
Mr Stephen Yeo	Team inspector (Former head, SofH school)