



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

VINEHALL SCHOOL

**BOARDING WELFARE
INTERMEDIATE INSPECTION**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Vinehall School

The Early Years Foundation Stage was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of School	Vinehall School
DfE Number	845/6004
Registered Charity Number	307014
Address	Vinehall School Vinehall Road Mountfield Robertsbridge East Sussex TN32 5JL
Telephone Number	01580 880413
Fax Number	01580 882119
Email Address	rfollett@vinehallschool.com
Head	Mr Richard Follett
Chair of Governors	Mr William Foster-Kemp
Age Range	2 to 13
Total Number of Pupils	251
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (138 boys; 113 girls)
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS): 5 5-11: 153 3-5 (EYFS): 29 11-13: 64
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 206
Number of Boarders	Total: 45 Full: 18 Weekly: 4 Flexible: 23
Inspection Dates	20 Jan 2015 to 22 Jan 2015

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule* for intermediate inspections, focusing primarily on compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (NMS). The inspection occurs over a period of two and a half continuous days in the school.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, as amended. This inspection focuses on the school's compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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 in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgement.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors conducted formal interviews with boarders, held discussions with senior members of staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended registration sessions. Inspectors visited the boarding house and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and boarding pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Jan Preece

Reporting Inspector

Mr Anthony Hobson

Team Inspector for Boarding
(Boarding Housemaster, IAPS school)

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Vinehall School is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils from the ages of 2 to 13. It is situated in forty-seven acres of Sussex countryside, two miles from the village of Robertsbridge, and was founded in 1938 to educate local children. The school's teaching accommodation and recreational and sporting facilities are grouped around a Victorian country house. The boarding accommodation is on the upper floor of the main building. Boys and girls are accommodated in dormitories at opposite ends of the house, separated by a common room, laundry and the houseparents' flat. The school has charitable status and is administered by a board of governors. Since the previous inspection the school's theatre has been completely refurbished. The shape of the day and week has been changed to allow greater time for activities, and formal Saturday school has been replaced with a range of enrichment pursuits, offered to pupils in Years 3 to 8.
- 1.2 The school aims: to provide an excellent all-round education both academically and through extra-curricular activities, within a high quality learning environment; to develop in each pupil independence, commitment and enthusiasm; to foster a spirit of mutual respect and kindness, and to encourage everyone to do their best for the community; to encourage all pupils to participate fully in school life, and to learn about themselves and their place in the world. The school's specific aims for boarding are: to develop each individual as a whole person; to engender an environment based on mutual respect and equal opportunities; to promote strong links with parents.
- 1.3 At the time of inspection there were 251 pupils on roll, 138 boys and 113 girls, of whom 23 boys and 22 girls in Years 3 to 8 were boarders, either on a full, weekly or flexible basis. Most pupils are of white British origin, and come from professional or business backgrounds within the locality, and one-half of the full boarders are from overseas. The school has identified 38 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 31 receive individual support. Eleven pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), all of whom receive support.
- 1.4 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. SUMMARY

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

2.1 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2013.

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

2.2 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

1. Ensure that regular self-evaluation informs the boarding action plan and that this is linked to school development planning.

(iii) Progress since the previous inspection

2.3 The previous boarding welfare inspection was undertaken by ISI in February 2012. No recommendations were made.

3. COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS

3.(a) Boarding provision and care

- 3.1 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.2 The school has a suitable induction process for new boarders, who are allocated a boarding 'guardian' to help them to settle into boarding life. Before they arrive, new boarders and their parents are sent informative handbooks. Each boarder has a choice of adults whom they might approach with a concern and all report that they are well looked after. Boarders are also aware of the independent listener whom they may contact in case of concerns or distress. Contact details, along with those of appropriate external helplines, are prominently displayed on notice boards. [NMS 2]
- 3.3 The school implements effective policies for the care of boarders who are unwell. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire all the boarders indicated that they are happy with the care they receive when ill. Medical arrangements are overseen by a qualified nurse who organises the provision for first aid, medical emergencies and those with medical conditions. The suitably equipped medical room is located centrally in the boarding house, adjacent to comfortable sick bays for both the boys and girls. Household remedies and prescribed medicines are stored securely and administered by suitably trained personnel. The matrons take boarders to local specialised medical services when necessary. Records of treatment and medication are meticulous and parents give the required consent. Boarders' confidentiality and privacy are respected. [NMS 3]
- 3.4 Boarders are able to contact their families using mobile telephones and email. They also have access to private school telephones, and boarders from overseas may use video messaging. In interviews boarders expressed the view that access to wireless technology in the house would enhance arrangements. Boarders' use of electronic communications is monitored and controlled to promote their safety, and mobile devices are kept securely by staff outside the times allocated for their use. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a few parents indicated that their children do not enjoy boarding, though no reasons were given. Most boarders spoken to said that they enjoy the boarding experience, though a very small number of full boarders commented that they experience some homesickness. [NMS 4]
- 3.5 The boarding areas for boys and girls are in separate wings of the house. All dormitories are spacious, well maintained, comfortably furnished and warm. Boarders personalise their space with posters, flags and photographs. Suitably appointed toilet and shower facilities, which are clean and afford privacy, are located close to the dormitories. Two recreational rooms are well equipped for games, relaxation and reading, and the library, which is used for prep, music block and sports facilities are close to the house. Boarding accommodation provides suitable protection from unauthorised visitors and surveillance equipment does not intrude on boarders' privacy. [NMS 5]
- 3.6 All dietary requirements are catered for and boarders are provided with nutritious, varied and healthy meals. In conversations with inspectors nearly all the boarders praised the food and said that their suggestions, conveyed to the catering manager in their food committee, are reflected in the menus. The kitchens and dining room provide suitable accommodation for the hygienic preparation, serving and consumption of the boarders' meals. Boarders have easy access to drinking water, and toast is available during the evening in addition to fruit and snacks during the day. [NMS 8]

- 3.7 The matrons are responsible for the laundering of boarders' clothing and bedding. Laundry is neatly stored and returned to the correct boarder. Boarders are able to obtain toiletries and stationery from the dispensary. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, all boarders agreed that their belongings are safe. They have bedside cupboards for personal possessions and any valuable items are given to staff for safekeeping. [NMS 9]
- 3.8 Boarders may attend a varied range of after-school activities, including sports, music, craft and particular interests such as astronomy and photography. After evening prep they take part in music practice or in games in the sports hall organised by Gap Year students, and occasionally go swimming. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a few boarders were not happy with the balance of activities and free time. However, in interviews with inspectors, boarders praised the range of activities provided though reported that music practice often prevents their participation in sports hall activities. Full use is made of the school grounds and facilities, particularly in the summer, and boarders may find safe areas to be alone. A full programme of activities, such as fencing, pottery, carpentry and model making, as well as trips to local cinemas, to recreational centres and for shopping, ensure that boarders are happily and gainfully occupied at the weekend. The provision of newspapers, television news and current affairs topics in assemblies allows boarders the opportunity to gain information about events in the outside world. [NMS 10]

3.(b) Arrangements for welfare and safeguarding

- 3.9 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.10 The school pays careful regard to its arrangements to ensure boarders' health and safety, which are monitored by the health and safety committee that meets termly. A suitable risk assessment policy has been prepared. This is supported by detailed risk assessments for both the premises and external visits. To promote good practice, staff have recently undertaken training in carrying out risk assessments. Equipment and facilities are regularly inspected for safety and maintained efficiently, and health and safety records are well documented. Consequently, all the boarders report that they feel safe. [NMS 6]
- 3.11 Fire risk assessments are regularly reviewed and fire equipment is maintained and checked at suitable intervals. All staff undertake fire awareness training as part of their induction, updated as necessary, and sufficient numbers of resident staff are trained as fire officers. Evacuation drills are held regularly, including when boarders are asleep, and are evaluated and recorded appropriately. [NMS 7]
- 3.12 Child protection and welfare procedures are robust and well implemented. The safeguarding policy complies with recent guidance and all staff and governors undertake regular training appropriate to their level of responsibility. Those who are new to the school receive thorough induction training to ensure that they clearly understand their responsibilities and the school's procedures. A welfare team monitors pupils' well-being and pastoral concerns. The designated safeguarding governor attends these meetings and provides a detailed termly report to governors. The full governing body reviews the safeguarding policy and procedures annually. [NMS 11]
- 3.13 The school has effective policies to promote good behaviour, guard against bullying and promote e-safety, which are understood by staff and pupils. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a few boarders were not happy with the awarding of rewards and sanctions in school time. However, in discussion boarders

stated that the system of rewards and sanctions in the boarding house is suitable and applied fairly. They report that they have no concerns about bullying, a view shared by their parents in response to the pre-inspection questionnaire and supported by scrutiny of the school's disciplinary records. Concerns about boarders' behaviour and well-being are communicated in weekly staff meetings, as well as amongst boarding staff. Records of misdemeanours, rewards and sanctions are suitably maintained. [NMS 12]

- 3.14 The school has recently developed a rigorous system for staff recruitment to ensure that no-one starts work until all checks are complete. A few minor administrative issues have been rectified and overall procedures are robust. All adults who live on site are subject to appropriate checks, and visitors are overseen so that they do not have unsupervised contact with pupils. Resident staff are informed of their responsibilities through an appropriate written agreement. The school does not appoint guardians for boarders from overseas but does observe arrangements to ensure that they are working well. [NMS 14]

3.(c) Leadership and management of the boarding provision

- 3.15 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.16 The aims and ethos of boarding are clearly displayed on notice boards in the boarding house and on the website, and published in the boarding staff handbook. The warm and friendly atmosphere in the house accurately reflects these aims, though in discussion not all boarders were aware of them. [NMS 1]
- 3.17 The governors demonstrate a strong commitment to boarding, regarding it as being integral to the school's purpose, which is exemplified in their regular visits to the boarding house. The leadership is fully involved in boarding, and weekly meetings take place with the housemistress. The housemistress is suitably experienced and supported by Gap Year students and the assistant housemaster in the evenings and at weekends. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, all parents agreed that boarding is well led and managed. Teachers undertake prep supervision and all boarders have a tutor who maintains informal contact with them, particularly with regard to their work and progress. Information is effectively communicated between house and academic staff at staff meetings, as well as in meetings amongst boarding house staff. The required boarding records are maintained, though action planning is not clearly linked to self-evaluation, nor does it feed into the school development plan. [NMS 13]
- 3.18 All boarding staff have appropriate job descriptions. They undertake a thorough induction programme and those who work solely in the boarding house receive regular appraisal of their work. Whilst teachers who act as boarding tutors report informally to the housemistress, formal appraisal arrangements do not consistently include a review of their contribution to boarding. Boarding staff undertake external training as well as visits to other boarding settings to share good practice. Supervision arrangements, including suitably timed roll calls, and sufficient numbers of duty staff ensure that boarders' whereabouts are known. There is a clear policy for staff to follow should a boarder go missing, though this has not been required. Boarders may easily contact an adult should they need support in the night and they do not have access to staff accommodation; this is suitably separated from the boarders' accommodation. [NMS 15]
- 3.19 Boarders, including those from overseas and any with medical needs, report that they are treated equally, and those of differing backgrounds, ages and abilities mix

well in a family atmosphere. In accordance with the school's boarding aims, boarders are sensitively supported according to their individual needs. [NMS16]

- 3.20 Boarders report that they have sufficient opportunities to offer suggestions to boarding staff, both formally, such as through the boarders' food committee, and informally, such as in discussions with the headmaster and with the housemistress. Their responses in questionnaires set by boarding staff have resulted in improvements such as the provision of games consoles, clocks in every dormitory and a wider choice of books in the common room. [NMS 17]
- 3.21 The school has a suitable complaints procedure, available to parents on the website. Detailed records indicate that formal complaints are rare and have been handled appropriately. [NMS 18]
- 3.22 Boarding prefects have a clearly defined role and are suitably trained, supervised and supported through regular meetings with the housemistress. A small minority of boarders did not feel that they have sufficient opportunities to take on responsibilities in school, although they consider that becoming a boarding prefect is a privilege for a very small number of boarders in Year 8. In interviews boarders reported that the boarding prefects exercise their responsibilities fairly. [NMS 19]
- 3.23 The school does not arrange lodgings for boarders. [NMS 20]