



Additional Inspection Report

Tonbridge School

November 2023

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 Gavin Rochussen		
Proprietor	Worshipful Company of Skinners		
Age range	13 to 18		
Number of pupils on roll	806		
	Day pupils	347	Boarders 459
	Seniors	474	Sixth Form 332
Date of inspection	14 November 2023		

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 Tonbridge School is an independent boarding and day school for male pupils situated in Tonbridge, Kent. Founded in 1553, it achieved charitable company status in 2003. The majority of the board of governors is appointed by the Worshipful Company of Skinners.
- 1.2 There are seven boarding houses and five day houses. The school has 171 pupils who require support for special educational needs and/or difficulties (SEND), none of whom has an education, health and care plan. English is an additional language for 253 pupils. The school's previous inspection was a regulatory compliance and educational quality inspection in November 2021.

Purpose of the inspection

- 1.3 This was an unannounced additional inspection at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) which focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs), and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding 2022.

Regulations which were the focus of the inspection	Team judgements
Part 2, paragraph 5 (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils); NMS 13	Met
Part 3, paragraphs 7 (safeguarding) and 8 (safeguarding of boarders); NMS 8	Met
Part 3, paragraphs 9 (behaviour) and 10 (bullying); NMS 15 and 16	Met
Part 3, paragraph 14 (supervision of pupils); NMS 20	Met
Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment); NMS 9	Met
Part 4, paragraphs 18-21 (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors); NMS 19	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
Part 7, paragraph 33 (complaints procedure); NMS 14	Met
Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management); NMS 2	Met

2. Inspection findings

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [ISSR Part 2, paragraph 5; NMS 13]

- 2.1 The school meets the standards.
- 2.2 The school 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. It ensures that principles are actively promoted which encourage pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures. These are promoted effectively through lessons, assemblies and the attitudes demonstrated by staff. In discussions, pupils demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the importance of showing respect for others, including those with protected characteristics, including sex and race. Records show that staff challenge, record and report any discriminatory language which they may encounter from anyone at the school. Full, appropriate reviews by leaders and governors take place after any significant event involving discrimination and any necessary improvements are instigated effectively.

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

Safeguarding policy

- 2.3 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.4 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.5 The school meets the standards.
- 2.6 Implementation of all aspects of the school's safeguarding procedures is effective in providing support to ensure the welfare of pupils, including boarders.
- 2.7 Safeguarding procedures are implemented effectively to safeguard children at risk and those in particular need. Staff show effective understanding of their responsibilities, including with regard to child-on-child abuse. Prompt action is taken by staff to ensure the safety of any children who are at risk of harm. All behavioural issues and allegations of sexualised behaviour or bullying, including allegations of sexual or racial harassment, are treated as potential safeguarding concerns and addressed effectively.
- 2.8 Child protection records are held securely and with suitable confidentiality. This enables staff to identify consistently and act upon welfare considerations for individual pupils. The school monitors records to identify patterns of concern. In discussions, staff confirmed that they recognise the vulnerabilities of boarders when sharing overnight accommodation. Pupils' wellbeing is further supported by effective personal, social and health education, which includes appropriate focus on mental health. Care for pupils' mental health is enhanced by the availability of suitably trained staff to provide counselling. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online and the school has appropriate controls of the use of technology. Senior leaders are aware of any negative trends in online activity and take effective steps to counter them.
- 2.9 Records show that the school communicates and refers concerns effectively, including to pertinent external agencies when appropriate. The safeguarding team seeks advice when necessary, including

from the Prevent programme. Pupils, including boarders, reported in discussion that they feel safe in school. They said that if any concerns arise, they report them, confident they will receive a response and action will be taken where needed. Records of safeguarding, which are suitably thorough, confirm that any concerns are dealt with swiftly and appropriately. The school liaises appropriately with parents about any safeguarding concerns.

- 2.10 The safeguarding policy gives contact details as required for local safeguarding partners. The training for those with specific safeguarding responsibilities is in line with local requirements and statutory advice and is up to date. Training for teaching and non-teaching staff is of sufficient quality and frequency. Recent training includes courses with regard to staff conduct, anti-bullying, behaviour and online safety. Leaders and staff demonstrate appropriate awareness of the staff code of conduct, including the low-level concerns policy and safeguarding procedures, and are confident to use them. They have a suitable knowledge of the thresholds for reporting issues or incidents. Staff show suitable understanding of the Prevent strategy.
- 2.11 The school has effective recruitment procedures which include appropriate checks on boarding staff. Suitable arrangements for handling allegations against staff or senior leaders, and potential misconduct, are included in safeguarding procedures; they include seeking immediate advice from the local authority designated safeguarding officer (LADO). Records show that such procedures are followed effectively, and the school follows up such actions promptly. The school understands its role in reporting any person to relevant regulatory bodies if circumstances require it and fulfils this expectation effectively.
- 2.12 Governors are trained appropriately in safeguarding. A governor with appropriate expertise maintains a close working contact with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). Governors are suitably proactive in the school with regards to monitoring safeguarding policies and procedures, including through arrangements for an annual review. Governors review any serious safeguarding incidents effectively. They act swiftly to facilitate improvement when review identifies this as needed.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – behaviour and bullying [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 9 and 10; NMS 15 and 16]

- 2.13 The school meets the standards.
- 2.14 A suitable behaviour policy and arrangements to guard against bullying are in place. Both are implemented effectively.
- 2.15 There is a clear code of conduct for pupils, including boarders. Arrangements are in place to promote good behaviour and to ensure that pupils are able to learn and that boarders have a safe place to live. Sanctions are applied appropriately and proportionately. However, boarders reported that sanctions for minor misdemeanours can vary between boarding houses. Records of behavioural incidents are recorded and monitored effectively to allow any trends to be identified.
- 2.16 Pupils reported that there is very little bullying in the school. Records support this view. Staff receive effective training about bullying and pupils are given suitable guidance. In discussions, boarders agreed that they are now willing to speak out quickly if there is any perceived bullying. Bullying incidents are treated in the same way in all boarding houses and parents are now informed promptly when incidents occur. Records show that the school provides suitable support for the alleged victim and perpetrator. The effectiveness of any action taken is monitored, with further education provided for all pupils where necessary.
- 2.17 Detailed recording enables all pastoral concerns to be logged for each pupil. All incidents of misbehaviour between pupils are considered as potential bullying and/or safeguarding issues, and trends analysed.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – supervision of pupils [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 14; NMS 20]

- 2.18 The school meets the standards.
- 2.19 Pupils, including boarders, are properly supervised by appropriately qualified and trained staff. The school has recently reviewed and strengthened the arrangements for supervising boarders overnight. There are sufficient staff on duty in the boarding houses during the evenings and at night. Those staff supervising boarding are given suitable guidance for their roles. Boarding staff check that all boarders are in their rooms at bedtimes. Boarders can easily contact a member of staff at night, if required.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16; NMS 9]

- 2.20 The school meets the standards.
- 2.21 The school has a suitable risk assessment policy which is implemented effectively. Staff conduct appropriate risk assessments for each area of the school and for the wellbeing of pupils with particular needs. The school ensures that appropriate action is taken to reduce any risks that are identified, in particular any risk of harm with regard to the safeguarding of boarders.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18–21; NMS 19]

- 2.22 The school meets the standards.
- 2.23 The school makes appropriate checks before appointment to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors. These include checks of the person's identity, their medical fitness, their right to work in the UK, their qualifications, an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, an overseas check if needed, a check against the barred list, and a check against the list of those prohibited from teaching and/or management if relevant. A single central register of appointments is kept as required, detailing whether the appointments have been carried out and, if so, on which date. The safeguarding governor monitors the process regularly and effectively.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

- 2.24 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Manner in which complaints are handled [ISSR Part 7, paragraph 33; NMS 14]

- 2.25 The school meets the standards.
- 2.26 The school's complaints procedure is available on the school website. It provides for complaints and concerns to be considered on an informal basis; for the establishment of a formal procedure for a complaint to be made in writing; for a hearing before a panel which includes an independent member and allows for a parent to be accompanied; for the panel to make findings and recommendations; and for a confidential record to be kept of findings. It requires records of complaints to indicate where these involve boarding and enables boarders to raise a complaint in good faith. Records of complaints show that the school follows its own policy appropriately. Formal complaints are handled by senior leaders in line with the school's procedures. Whether or not complaints have been upheld, the school undertakes a detailed review to identify any lessons to be learned from them and implements any consequent recommendations effectively.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 2]

2.27 The school meets the standards.

2.28 Senior leaders, boarding leaders and governors demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role and fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently. The wellbeing of pupils, including boarders, is actively promoted. Oversight of the management of boarding and welfare provision is effective.

3. Regulatory action points

- 3.1 For the regulations which were the focus of this inspection, the school meets all of the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors held discussions with the headmaster, senior leaders, other members of staff and the chair of governors. They visited different areas of the school and talked with groups of boarders. They scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.