

School inspection report

17 October 2023 to 19 October 2023

Bedford School

De Parys Avenue
Bedford
MK40 2TU

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as ‘the Standards’.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. The proprietor works closely with leaders to prepare pupils well for their futures. Leaders ensure that school values including kindness and integrity are central to curriculum planning and are reflected in school policies. These values promote supportive relationships and mutual respect between pupils, their peers and staff. As a result, pupils feel happy to be at school.
2. Governors' skills and knowledge enable them to provide an appropriate level of challenge and support to school leaders. Leaders' thorough self-evaluation is used to guide decision-making and school development. Leaders regularly consult with pupils to consider how school development plans contribute to meet pupils' needs and explore whether there are unintended consequences in terms of the impact on pupil wellbeing. As a result, decisions are well considered and appropriate in meeting the needs of pupils.
3. Leaders ensure that there is a broad and suitable curriculum with a variety of subjects which enables pupils to develop an appropriate range of skills. The curriculum is adapted over time to meet the changing needs of pupils. As a result, further curriculum options have been added in the sixth form.
4. Teachers plan effectively because of their detailed understanding of pupil needs. This enables pupils to make expected or better progress from their starting points.
5. Leaders promote a culture in which pupils respect each other through the provision of a carefully planned and well-implemented personal development curriculum. Pupils behave well across all phases of the school and leaders respond to any rare cases of poor behaviour quickly and appropriately with a focus on pupils learning from their mistakes.
6. Leaders generally ensure that the school premises are well maintained, and health and safety system checks are carried out appropriately. However, a lapse in monitoring by leaders resulted in an oversight that was rectified during the inspection.
7. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to participate in rich and varied sports, co-curricular and careers programmes. Pupils enjoy and greatly value these opportunities.
8. Pupils are ambitious in their career choices and appreciate the support and advice they receive from staff who deliver an engaging and appropriate careers curriculum.
9. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to contribute to the lives of others, for example, through service in the community and charity fundraising. Pupils have a strong desire to help others in their community and broader society. Pupils are self-confident and have well-developed leadership skills. They have a clear sense of right and wrong and are well prepared for life in British society.
10. Leaders ensure that the boarding provision is effective and meets pupils' needs. Boarders appreciate the opportunities they have to live and learn in an inclusive and supportive boarding community. Leaders, teachers, and pastoral staff effectively promote integration of pupils within

and across day and boarding houses. The positive relations between boarders and day students are supported by the linking of day and boarding houses.

11. Pupil wellbeing is central to the decisions made by school leaders. Staff implement effective policies and processes that protect pupils from harm and promote their wellbeing. Pupils feel safe and happy in school and in boarding.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards:

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met

Recommended next steps

Leaders should ensure that:

- the actions arising from health and safety checks are appropriately prioritised and promptly carried out.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. Governors challenge and support leaders effectively. Governors and leaders have well-established relationships with external agencies, including other schools in The Harpur Trust. These links provide valuable sources of guidance and training, which are used to support school improvement.
13. Governors regularly visit the school and listen to the views of pupils. Pupils help to shape decisions such as the content of the school's citizenship curriculum and aspects of the school's food and boarding arrangements.
14. Leaders have a clear vision for the school's development, based on comprehensive self-evaluation that leads to detailed planning at all levels of leadership and management. Leaders are ambitious for the school and its future. Leaders review and plan appropriately to fulfil these ambitions. Staff understand what leaders expect of them and feel well supported.
15. Leaders and staff promote respect for all people, regardless of difference. Consequently, pupils understand and respect protected characteristics in line with the school's values and this is evident in the behaviour of pupils throughout the school including in boarding life.
16. Pupil wellbeing and school values underpin leaders' decision-making. Leaders have suitable policies in place to promote pupils' wellbeing and ensure that these are implemented effectively and consistently.
17. Staff, including boarding staff, are readily available to parents and deal with any questions or concerns promptly. Leaders ensure the boarding provision is appropriate and well resourced. As a result, boarders feel safe, happy and well-supported.
18. Leaders respond in a timely and appropriate manner to concerns and complaints from parents in line with a suitable complaints policy. Leaders have also published a clear complaints policy for pupils in the upper school and in the prep school. This sets out clear and supportive procedures for pupils who wish to raise a complaint. Leaders are reflective when concerns occur, and this learning influences future school development planning.
19. Parents receive regular, detailed and informative reports about their child's progress. Upper school reports include opportunities for pupils to self-assess and comment on their progress, highlighting the reflective culture of the school. Leaders ensure that all other important and relevant information is made available to parents through the school's comprehensive website and parent portal.
20. Leaders ensure that the relevant requirements of the Equality Act (2010) are met and the school has a suitable accessibility plan.
21. However, leaders' monitoring of ongoing health and safety checks had not identified that some checks had not been carried out promptly. This arose from an oversight and was addressed during the inspection.

22. Leaders carry out effective risk assessments and implement any resulting actions prior to pupils commencing activities, in line with school policy. For example, sixth-form pupils are given safeguarding training prior to taking part in community work. This contributes to a culture throughout the school which values pupils' safety and wellbeing.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

All the relevant Standards are met

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. Pupils have access to a broad curriculum and study a wide range of subjects. Leaders regularly review provision to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of pupils. For example, BTEC sports science has been introduced in the sixth form in response to pupils' request for examined sport in the curriculum.
24. Pupils in the prep school, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL), make better than expected progress from their starting points.
25. At GCSE, most pupils similarly make better than expected progress. All groups of pupils make expected progress at A level and in the International Baccalaureate (IB) qualification.
26. In order to promote the highest academic expectations and to enable better progress for all pupils, leaders systematically monitor and review the quality of teaching across all phases of the school. Leaders identify effective teaching strategies, which they share with staff through the school's comprehensive professional development programme. Subject leaders contribute to sharing good practice and successfully implement effective strategies in their departments. As a result, teachers feel more confident in their teaching.
27. Leaders use pupils' assessment data to carefully evaluate pupils' progress. Subject leaders use this information to inform departmental and curriculum planning which supports teachers to adapt work effectively to meet pupil needs.
28. Leaders ensure that specialist and well-resourced provision is in place for pupils who have SEND and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Boarders receive effective academic support in the boarding houses and pupils are regularly consulted about teaching and learning, for example, leaders made changes to the prep school homework policy following pupil discussions.
29. Teachers use their expert knowledge of their subject effectively to plan and deliver teaching, which are generally well-matched to the needs of pupils. As a result, pupils engage well in lessons and show high levels of enthusiasm for learning. Teachers' feedback to pupils helps them to improve their work and supports their progress. Pupils apply themselves readily to acquiring and practising new skills and are willing to take risks in their learning. As a result, pupils develop their self-confidence and self-esteem.
30. Leaders provide appropriate resources and effective training for staff and pupils in line with the school's strategic focus on digital technology. As a result, teachers and pupils use technology confidently and successfully.
31. Leaders promote a range of opportunities for pupils to extend their learning through access to a range of projects, competitions and societies. Pupils' participation is high because they enjoy attending and find the activities interesting. Pupils develop their creativity and communication skills, for example by taking part in the school's annual creativity competition which celebrates art, drama, music and creative writing. As a result, pupils across the school are able to communicate confidently and effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

All the relevant Standards are met

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

32. Leaders have created an environment where expectations of good behaviour are embedded and effective across the whole school. Leaders adopt a reflective approach to behaviour management and enable pupils to consider and take responsibility for their own actions. Pupils play an active role in promoting positive behaviour through taking part in assemblies or in their roles as peer mentors. Consequently, pupils develop high levels of self-knowledge and emotional maturity.
33. Leaders have designed the vertical tutor group system to enable older pupils to act as peer mentors to younger pupils in their houses. Pupils are highly considerate of each other and the theme of mutual trust and respect for others regardless of difference is evident both around school and in the boarding houses.
34. The school's anti-bullying policy is implemented effectively. Leaders act quickly to take appropriate action on the rare occasions that bullying has occurred, and pupils feel that the school manages bullying well.
35. Leaders ensure that there is a suitable programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, which includes effective provision for relationships and sex education (RSE). The well-planned curriculum is age-appropriate and adapted to meet pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils understand the importance of making appropriate choices in life and in having healthy relationships. Parents are appropriately consulted about the curriculum in line with school policy.
36. Leaders promote the importance of physical education through the extensive use of well-resourced provision in the curriculum. Pupils appreciate the need to stay healthy and speak of the importance of sport to their physical and mental wellbeing. Leaders support pupils' mental health effectively through planned opportunities such as tutor time, specialised workshops, and the use of pupil mentors. As a result, pupils say they feel calm and confident when following their daily routines.
37. Pupils develop their moral understanding because of the emphasis leaders place on embedding school values into pupils' everyday lives. Chapel assemblies deepen pupils' spiritual understanding through planned reflections which have been appropriately matched to the age and needs of pupils.
38. Boarding accommodation is of high quality, with well-maintained rooms and suitable spaces for pupils to socialise and study. Boarders feel that their accommodation is homely and welcoming. Boarders' personal possessions are secure, and regular laundry provision is in place. All boarders are provided with good quality, nutritionally balanced meals, and snacks. House staff are readily available to provide suitable support if pupils have any concerns and boarders are supervised effectively by boarding staff. Appropriate arrangements are in place for boarders to contact their families or outside agencies.
39. The school has a suitable statement of boarding principles and practice which is made available to parents and is known and understood by boarders. Leaders actively seek and act upon boarders' views through a variety of means including the school's boarding council.

40. Pupils in the boarding houses settle quickly and feel well known because of the effective induction programme in place. Pupils value opportunities to collaborate and work together and this contributes to the strong sense of community within boarding houses and also between pupils in the boarding and day houses.
41. Leaders have put effective measures in place to protect pupils from harm including the deployment of trained security guards at the school gates. Appropriate fire evacuation drills take place, and staff receive regular fire training.
42. Leaders have a planned cycle of health and safety checks. However, two checks had not been carried out in a timely way. Swift action was taken during inspection to rectify this and leaders have put additional oversight into place, enabling closer monitoring of health and safety checks.
43. Suitably trained staff provide effective care for pupils who become unwell or who have specific medical needs. The attendance and admission registers are suitably maintained and stored. Any absence and trends in attendance are identified and acted on appropriately by pastoral staff in line with school policy. This ensures that risks to children missing education are minimised.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

All the relevant Standards are met

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

44. Leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for their future careers and next steps in education. The school follows the Gatsby benchmarks and provides an effective programme of careers guidance. This includes specialist advice, careers events and work experience. As a result, pupils make well-informed career choices. Sixth-form pupils go on to study a wide range of courses, often at highly competitive institutions in the UK. In the prep school the careers curriculum is closely linked to the school's bespoke 'future skills' curriculum, which includes an effective transition skills programme. This enables pupils to feel happy and confident about moving to the next step in their education.
45. Pupils value the extensive opportunities they have to take up leadership roles in school and to contribute positively to the school community. For example, leaders support pupils to effectively delegate responsibilities in boarding houses, encouraging pupils to take care of their surroundings. Leaders encourage pupils to raise matters of concern to the school council, house committees or boarders' committees. Pupils readily utilise these opportunities and feel that their opinions are valued and considered by school leaders.
46. The school's values, which include responsibility and integrity, are strongly embedded in school life and leaders apply rewards and sanctions in an appropriate and consistent manner. This contributes to pupils' clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong and gives pupils the confidence to speak up if they think something is wrong.
47. Pupils contribute widely to the local community through activities such as working at food banks and local primary schools. Pupils across the school are active in their charity fundraising and decide collectively on a charity for each house to support. The whole school comes together to raise significant funds for a variety of charities including a national charity linked to male health issues.
48. Leaders and managers ensure that links with the community are meaningful and mutually beneficial, with pupils building sustained relationships with the local community and the charities they support. As a result, pupils have a strong awareness of the world in which they live and understand the positive contribution they can make to society. The school value of kindness is strongly held by staff and pupils, and this helps pupils to appreciate the need to help others less fortunate than themselves.
49. Staff actively promote inclusion and respect for all groups of people across the whole school. This can be seen in the boarding houses where pupils of different faiths and cultures form a harmonious and inclusive community which pupils regard as a family. Pupils have broadened their understanding of inclusion through working with pupils from a neighbouring school for female pupils in the local area. Pupils enjoy being actively involved in educating their peers about inclusion and diversity.
50. Leaders ensures that pupils' economic understanding is developed through the personal development and citizenship programmes. Consultation with pupils ensures this provision meets their needs effectively. For example, discussions with pupils led to a greater focus on financial

planning. Pupils have many opportunities within the curriculum and in co-curricular activities to develop skills such as creative thinking and problem-solving as part of developing their entrepreneurial skills.

51. Leaders ensure that British values are promoted across the curriculum. For example, pupils actively participate in democratic elections where they nominate their peers for positions of responsibility within the school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

All the relevant Standards are met

Safeguarding

52. Governors take an active role in ensuring the implementation of the school's comprehensive and robust safeguarding policy. Governors meet regularly with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and assure themselves of the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements through conducting regular reviews.
53. Leaders ensure that staff undertake up-to-date statutory safeguarding training in line with the school policy. Training includes the Prevent duty and termly 'lockdown' drill to ensure pupil safety in the event of an unforeseen incident. Leaders assure themselves of the effectiveness of training by monitoring completion of training and assessing staff understanding. This enables staff to be proactive in identifying potential safeguarding issues and to be confident when educating pupils on how to keep themselves safe.
54. Pupils know how to report a safeguarding concern and how to access help for themselves or their peers when needed. Leaders actively seek to ensure that they are sensitive to hearing the views of pupils through the effective tutor system. This results in a healthy culture of pupils reporting concerns to staff who swiftly follow up in line with school policy. Pupils across all phases of the school feel safe, with boarders commenting that this helped their overall positive wellbeing.
55. Staff with designated safeguarding responsibilities work closely with the school pastoral committee which includes the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), staff from boarding and medical departments to ensure effective safeguarding arrangements are in place which protect the welfare of pupils. Leaders in the prep school ensure that accurate records are maintained and transferred to the upper school upon transition.
56. Pupils know how to keep safe online when at school or at home through the carefully planned personal development curriculum and tutor time sessions. Leaders take suitable actions in relation to online filtering and monitoring to keep pupils safe and governors regularly review arrangements for online safety.
57. Leaders ensure that the requirements relating to the suitability of staff and proprietors are met. The single central record of appointments is kept appropriately with effective oversight from the safeguarding governor.
58. Staff with designated safeguarding responsibilities are supported effectively by the governing body and the proprietor. Leaders work closely with external agencies. This enables well informed decision-making which considers risks appropriately and protects pupils from harm.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met

School details

School	Bedford School
Department for Education number	822/6002
Registered charity number	1066861
Address	De Parys Avenue Bedford MK40 2TU
Website	www.bedfordschool.org.uk
Proprietor	The Harpur Trust
Chair	Mr John Holland-Kaye
Headteacher	Mr James Hodgson
Age range	7 to 19
Number of pupils	1111
Number of boarding pupils	246
Date of previous inspection	26 to 27 June 2019

Information about the school

59. Bedford School is an independent day and boarding school for male pupils aged 7 to 19 years. Originally established by Royal Charter in 1552, the school moved to its current site in a residential area of Bedford in 1891. It is divided into two sections: the Prep School for pupils aged 7 to 13 and the Upper School which educates pupils from 13 to 19. Overall responsibility for the school rests with the trustees of the Harpur Trust charity, whilst day-to-day governance is delegated to the Bedford School Committee.
60. The school offers a range of boarding provision including full time, weekly and occasional options. Boarders are accommodated according to age in one of seven boarding houses.
61. The school has identified 180 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
62. English is an additional language for 126 pupils.
63. The school states that its mission is to teach pupils “to think intelligently, act wisely and be fully engaged in a challenging and changing world”. To deliver this, the school concentrates its efforts in three main areas: developing the young person within, realising their academic potential and providing sustainability over time.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

17 October to 19 October 2023

64. A team of 10 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.
65. The following inspection activities were undertaken:
- discussions with school leaders, staff, and pupils
 - observations around the site and in lessons
 - review of pupils’ work
 - scrutiny of documentation and school records
 - The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI’s pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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