ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

7 November 2023 to 9 November 2023

Bedstone College

Bedstone
Bucknell
SY7 0BG

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'.

Contents

Summary of inspection findings

1. The proprietor, leaders and governors ensure that pupils receive a suitable education that enables them to make good progress. The curriculum successfully fulfils the aims of the school so that the wellbeing of the pupils is actively promoted. Leaders have been effective in improving the delivery of academic subjects through well-considered coaching and training for teachers.

2. Self-evaluation plays an integral part in leaders' approach to checking the school's effectiveness. As a result, leaders have an accurate view of the school's current strengths and areas for development. Governors and leaders are clear in their commitment to continually review and improve the work of the school.

3. Safeguarding is effective. Timely and appropriate action is taken, where necessary, to support pupils and to mitigate risks to their physical and emotional wellbeing.

4. The personal, social and health education (PSHE)curriculum has been revised recently, to better meet pupils' educational and recreational needs. Innovative strategies have enabled pupils to learn about such topics as how to recognise and resist peer and media pressure. Leaders have planned further training to enhance teacher skills in this area and further embed this more creative approach.

5. Staff know pupils as individuals and support them well. Much of this knowledge is reliant on personal memory. However, communication is effective and pastoral support for pupils is highly effective. Leaders and governors are exploring systems to store records centrally and more consistently. Leaders and managers use a variety of systems to create and keep appropriate records for safeguarding, health and safety, risk assessment and staff training.

6. Senior staff and the learning support team successfully identify and support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They provide one-to-one support, devise learning plans and communicate these to teachers. Leaders analyse and use assessment information effectively to evaluate pupils' progress over time. However, they do not make best use of the data to measure the impact of the support they provide for the pupils who have SEND.

7. Teachers prepare lessons well and tailor the activities to meet pupils' different academic needs and build on previous learning. While most pupils who have SEND are supported effectively, using their individual learning plans, there is some inconsistency in teachers' implementation of the recommended strategies to ensure that these pupils always receive the support they need.

8. Pupils behave well. Suitable policies for anti-bullying and behaviour management are in place and are reviewed regularly. Teachers use a range of appropriate strategies to manage challenging behaviour which occurs occasionally in the senior part of the school.

9. Some pupils join the school for short periods of time, for example for three or four weeks to improve their English. These pupils are not always well-integrated with the rest of the pupil body. This sometimes leads to their being treated inconsiderately as 'outsiders'. The school leaders and staff are considering ways of better integrating these pupils so that they are equally valued by their peers and treated consistently well.

10. Senior leaders provide effective care and support for boarders from the UK and overseas. Boarders develop the independence, resilience and tolerance they need to live and study in close proximity to others and make a positive contribution to boarding life.

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:

- they use assessment information more effectively in order to better evaluate the impact of their support on the learning of pupils who have SEND

- They develop strategies to successfully integrate pupils who join the school for short periods of time.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Senior leaders have the skills and knowledge they need. They fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. Leaders, as well as teachers and tutors, are approachable and accessible so that all pupils are well known as individuals. Leaders are flexible and positive in their aspirations for the school.

12. Governors have a thorough and accurate understanding of the school. They have effective oversight of matters such as health, safety, and safeguarding. Through appropriate support and challenge, governors help senior leaders to develop and successfully implement initiatives to improve wellbeing and learning for the pupils.

13. Senior leaders regularly review and evaluate the school's effectiveness. Where areas for development are identified, initiatives are planned and implemented to refine and improve provision. This has included additional training and support to enhance the skills of teachers who have requested training or when professional review has identified a need.

14. Leaders are reflective and alert to the possibilities of any unintended consequences of their actions. They demonstrate an eagerness to develop ideas swiftly and constructively, particularly when potentially adverse situations can be quickly resolved. For example, having relocated the medical centre to a more central point to improve access, staff identified as possibility that pupils' privacy may be compromised. Solutions were rapidly sought and acted upon.

15. Leaders manage complaints and concerns effectively. Complaints are recorded and responded to appropriately and within published timeframes. Details of how to make a complaint are available on the school's website.

16. Regular reports to parents on pupils' progress are informative. Useful information about the ethos of the school, details of the curriculum and key policies are readily accessible on the school's website. Information about boarding, as well as admissions and the arrangements for supporting pupils who have SEND, can also be found there. Such information, and the arrangements for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL), is available in several languages on request.

17. Governors ensure that those with responsibility for health and safety take appropriate actions to keep the school safe. Appropriate risk assessment guidance ensures that effective action is taken to reduce risks to pupils' welfare. Leaders are alert to potential risks and take prompt and effective action when they are identified. Pastoral leaders monitor and manage risks to pupils arising from bullying and thoughtless acts, so promoting their wellbeing.

18. Governors ensure that leaders and teachers meet the needs of pupils. The accessibility plan is reviewed regularly so that the curriculum and other aspects of the provision are available to all groups of pupils. Senior leaders plan and monitor the delivery of the academic curriculum and the impact of the complementary activity programme to ensure that provision is appropriate and supports pupils' development.

19. Leaders take swift and decisive action when concerns arise. As a result of leaders' thoughtful reflections on the boarding provision, they have implemented various processes to improve the support provided to pupils. New leaders of boarding are implementing revised and improved policies and procedures. More effective ways of listening to boarders' concerns have been introduced.

Boarders are now benefitting from weekly conversations with boarding staff to check on their wellbeing and enhance their pastoral support.

20. Governors are vigilant in their oversight of safeguarding arrangements and support effective measures to safeguard pupils. Safeguarding training is thorough and confirms that leaders equip staff with the knowledge and understanding they need to play their part in protecting pupils. Leaders take action by reviewing practice and implementing initiatives to reduce bullying and to ensure that behaviour is managed effectively.

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

21. Leaders plan the curriculum effectively, considering pupils' interests and needs. The range of subjects in all phases of the school is sufficiently varied to provide opportunities to gain a wide range of knowledge and skills. The range of subjects provided meets requirements but are limited by the choices made by pupils and the availability of suitably qualified teachers. The delivered curriculum is complemented by an enrichment programme and extracurricular activities.

22. The curriculum programme has a particular focus on developing pupils' linguistic, literacy and numeracy skills. A significant proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. Some of these pupils join the school for relatively short periods of time to improve their English. There is specific support for them, particularly for those who find it difficult to access lessons in the early stages of their time at the school. Teachers particularly focus on vocabulary and English language acquisition so that all groups of pupils can access the teaching and learning successfully. As a result of this effective support, pupils communicate articulately. They access information, through their developing fluency in reading and are confident in using numeracy and digital technology to enhance their learning.

23. Teachers enable pupils to develop problem-solving and numeracy skills, as well as the use of technical vocabulary, including through practical activities in subjects such as music and science. Throughout the school, teachers support pupils' independent learning through well-chosen tasks such as considering case studies in geography. Pupils are appreciative of the constructive feedback and support given to them by their teachers.

24. Leaders and teachers enable pupils to make good progress and achieve well across the school. More robust assessment procedures are being implemented to enable closer scrutiny and evaluation of individual progress. Pupils achieve GCSE and A-level results which are at or above average. Most pupils, including those who have SEND, proceed to university or higher education.

25. Academic leaders assess and identify the learning needs of pupils well. They provide individual learning plans for pupils and guidance for teachers about the various strategies to use in order to meet the individual needs of pupils who have SEND. However, the planned strategies are not always incorporated into lessons. Assessment information is not always available for pupils who join the school for short periods of time. However, in the main, individual targets are set, with clear strategies in place to meet those targets.

26. Within several areas, including the arts, teachers encourage pupils to be aspirational, creative and confident and to always try, even when finding a task complicated. The positive and encouraging approach of staff helps to build pupils' confidence and encourages them to take risks in their learning, such as experimenting with unusual combinations of colours and materials to create bold pieces of artwork. Pupils communicate and collaborate well, respecting one another's views. Their work is of a high standard and demonstrates creativity and perseverance. Teachers know pupils very well and are adept at identifying their individual talents. Leaders suggest extension or extracurricular activities to enhance pupils' particular skills.

27. The cohort in Early Years is exceptionally small, and these pupils are integrated into a class with older children. The children's needs and interests are considered. Teachers plan activities carefully

for each individual, and their development and progress are diligently monitored and recorded. As a result, children in the early years make good progress and develop skills and knowledge well.

28. In the junior school, teachers plan programmes tailored closely to the needs and interests of pupils. Practical sessions in drama stimulate the pupils' imagination as well as consolidating reading and speaking skills. Pupils collaborate when working on research tasks such as when finding out about famous people in Ancient Greece. Many of this well-planned teaching develops and strengthens literacy and numeracy skills while pupils learn new material in creative ways.

29. Over recent terms, leaders have been developing a greater variety of activities more closely tailored to the interests of pupils. The intention is to increase participation and so encourage pupils, including boarders, to develop their emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills in different ways. Boarders also have access to a range of safe recreational areas, both indoors and outdoors, and there are safe areas at school where boarders can be alone if they wish.

30. Leaders provide a programme of co-curricular activities, including those for boarders, which include a variety of clubs, activities and competitive team sports, such as hockey and rugby. Approximately two-thirds of pupils in the sixth form participate in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme at gold level. These activities help pupils to gain self-confidence, develop their skills and independence and expand their horizons.

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

31. The promotion of pupils' wellbeing is at the centre of leaders' work. Leaders and staff lead by example and demonstrate positive working relationships. As a result, pupils build trusting relationships with their teachers. Pupils are confident and articulate, both in lessons and when speaking to adults during other times in the day.

32. Pupils take part in a range of co-curricular activities and sports options. The range of after-school activities helps pupils to develop decision-making and time-management skills, together with opportunities to make new friends. Pupils value and enjoy the sporting and other activities that are made available to them.

33. Senior leaders have recently developed a dedicated hub, staffed by a specialist practitioner, to support pupils' emotional and mental health. Empathy and warmth are shown towards those needing emotional support and counselling is available, as required.

34. The relationships and sex education (RSE) programme is interwoven with PSHE provision. Senior leaders have acted recently to increase the time allocation for this learning in order to ensure that pupils learn important life skills. The programme has recently been revised and is being implemented effectively. Sex education is now more effective. Pupils take part in discussions on such topics as positive relationships and what proper consent means. Teachers enable open discussion and encourage acceptance of differences of opinion, where appropriate.

35. The PSHE programme explores topics such as inclusion and diversity, including neurodiversity to further develop pupils' understanding and empathy. Pupils understand that discrimination of any kind is wrong. They treat other people fairly and with respect and understand why this is important.

36. Leaders have reviewed the school's policies and are implementing revised behaviour and anti-bullying procedures. Most pupils behave well most of the time. Some pupils exhibit challenging behaviour occasionally, and staff manage this effectively using a variety of appropriate strategies including restorative discussions.

37. Boarding staff have established an ethos that contributes positively to boarders' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing. Pupils have comfortable bedrooms with secure storage and recreational areas, and they participate in interesting activities. Staff provide nourishing food and suitable kitchen areas. There is a suitable programme of induction for new boarders. Relationships between boarders and staff are positive, based on trust and respect.

38. Leaders have enhanced the school's medical centre and have integrated it with the specialist hub to provide holistic support. Staff receive regular training and have first aid qualifications suitable for their role. The well-qualified nursing team provide effective support to pupils who require medical attention.

39. The school's premises and accommodation, including boarding houses, are well maintained and clean. Health and safety practices are implemented effectively. Regular fire drills, including during boarding time, and staff training ensure that effective precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire. The school's admissions and attendance registers are properly kept. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance diligently. Pupils are supervised appropriately by staff at all times.

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

40. Leaders have designed a curriculum which encourages pupils to be accepting of the differences that make individuals special. The recently revised personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) and RSE provision is effective. It includes creative ways of enhancing pupils' empathy and understanding towards others by exploring different cultures and debating current affairs. This new programme places more emphasis on understanding of inclusion and diversity. Pupils understand that discrimination of any kind is wrong. For example, discussions in PSHE help pupils to understand how unfair judgments on appearances can be. Most pupils are respectful and tolerant of each other's views and opinions. They treat other people fairly and with respect, celebrating the differences, such as of ethnicity and religion, within the school community. Through open and effective discussion, leaders and staff are working hard to create a culture where all members of the community, including parents, understand how important it is that pupils are well informed and respectful of others who are different.

41. There are timely opportunities for pupils to make informed choices about the next stage of their education. Pupils go on to study a variety of courses or careers, many of which have demanding entry requirements, both locally and internationally. Recognising that the previous careers programme was rather narrow in vision and somewhat dated, leaders instigated a review and revitalisation of this provision earlier this year. The re-energised and broader careers programme now provides pupils with many more opportunities to explore the wider world and their relationship with it. The programme enables pupils to consider a greater range of possibilities for their future. By encouraging reflection and understanding of their own strengths, weaknesses and preferences, it prepares pupils better for the next phase of their lives. Although the revised programme is relatively new, it is already having a positive impact.

42. Tutors and teachers discuss academic progress and personal development with pupils so that they learn to take responsibility for their own learning. Pupils do not hesitate to seek help and guidance when they need it because they are confident in the supportive response of teachers. Staff give constructive feedback and additional support freely which is particularly effective in the sixth form and examination years in the senior school.

43. Leaders have generated an ethos of respect and fairness in which pupils appreciate the difference between right and wrong. Pupils understand the requirement for rules in school and laws in society to protect everyone's interests. Pupils also understand that, living in a democratic society, not everyone thinks as they do, and discussion and disagreement are healthy.

44. Pupils have opportunities to contribute to society, such as charity fundraising and volunteering. In this way, pupils develop concern for others and actively look for ways of helping people.

45. The PSHE programme also includes learning about the management of money such as budgeting and the responsibility to pay tax. Further elements of economic education include the investment of time and cost of gaining further qualifications relative to the potential earning power of various careers. There are also charitable initiatives where pupils consider how the funds are raised and spent.

46. Boarders learn to work and socialise together in a collaborative, empathetic way. This is underpinned by the support they receive from the house staff. Pupils are encouraged by staff to express their opinions and feelings, whether in groups or in regular individual conversations.

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

47. Effective arrangements are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils, including boarders. Leaders ensure that safeguarding has a high profile in the school, and that staff receive effective and regular training. Prefects are also trained in listening to pupils' concerns and helping them to share with appropriate adults. Pupils have a strong understanding of what to do to report any concerns they may have. Staff act on pupils' concerns promptly and appropriately.

48. Safeguarding leaders receive regular training at an appropriate level. They are well informed about child protection procedures and contextual risks, including those that may occur online such as radicalisation. Leaders work effectively with external agencies when concerns arise. They refer to children's services or consult with the local authority designated officer in a timely manner.

49. Suitable risk assessment procedures are in place. Senior staff record risk assessments appropriately. Safeguarding records are appropriately kept in a mix of digital and paper records which sometimes complicates the gathering and sharing of information. However, the safeguarding team know their pupils well and offer well-judged support for them and their families.

50. Pupils feel safe in school and are confident that staff would act if they had a concern. In boarding, house staff encourage pupils to share their concerns. Boarding staff have recently implemented a newly developed house prefect system, enhancing the communication amongst boarders and promoting their wellbeing.

51. Leaders ensure that safer recruitment checks are completed for all adults including staff, volunteers and governors before they begin working at the school. Staff record these checks diligently.

52. Robust and effective strategies are in place to keep pupils, including boarders, safe online through the filtering and monitoring systems. The revised personal development programme teaches pupils how to stay safe online. Leaders are alert to current trends and potential harmful online content.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Bedstone College
Department for Education number	893/6000
Address	Bedstone College Bedstone Bucknell SY7 0BG
Website	www.bedstone.org
Proprietor	Bedstone Educational Ltd
Chair	Mr Robert Tasker
Headteacher	Mr Toby Mullins
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	156
Number of boarding pupils	43
Date of previous inspection	26 to 28 February 2019

Information about the school

53. Bedstone College is a co-educational independent day and boarding school. The school is a private limited company. The proprietor is the managing director of the company. The day-to-day running of the school is delegated to a local board of governors. The headteacher has delegated authority for operational matters.

54. Boarders are accommodated in two boarding houses, located on the school site.

55. The school has identified 63 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Nine pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

56. English is an additional language for 32 pupils.

57. The school states that its aims for pupils are to:

- build confidence
- be the best that they can be
- try new things
- be respectful of others
- have a sense of pride in themselves and the school community
- be curious, robust, adaptable and tolerant
- be well prepared for the world beyond school.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	7 to 9 November 2023

58. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

59. Inspection activities included:

- discussions with senior leaders, middle leaders, governors and staff
- discussions with groups of pupils, including boarders
- joint lesson walks with school leaders
- observations of teaching and learning
- scrutiny of documentation including policies, logs and risk assessments, minutes of meetings
- work scrutiny with pupils, including discussions about their work
- observations at break and lunchtimes
- observation of an assembly
- tours of the premises, boarding houses and the wellbeing hub.

60. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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