

School inspection report

5 to 7 December 2023

Cobham Hall

Brewers Road

Cobham

Kent

DA12 3BL

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. Leaders have appropriate knowledge and skills and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They actively promote the wellbeing of pupils. Leaders and governors work effectively together. They take a strategic approach to school development and focus on continual improvement.
2. The curriculum is broad and well structured. It reflects the international nature of the school. The curriculum is taught effectively and pupils make good progress. However, there is variation in how well subjects are taught and this affects the consistency of pupils' progress in different subjects. Pupils achieve well in public examinations, and they are highly successful in gaining places at their chosen universities. A carefully planned activities programme ensures that pupils participate enthusiastically and achieve well in a wide range of recreational pursuits.
3. Support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL) is effective. However, support for pupils who have SEND is inconsistent and their individual plans are not always followed. Where this is the case, their progress is less rapid.
4. The school's bespoke 'perspectives' programme, combined with the time devoted to personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE), ensures that pupils have an excellent understanding of the value of diversity and are well prepared for their future lives. Recent improvements to the careers education programme have yet to be fully embedded. Pupils are confident, articulate and well behaved.
5. Leaders ensure that the historic building and grounds are maintained in accordance with appropriate health and safety practice. The school has effective procedures to prevent and respond to the risks from fire. Leaders and governors manage risks well so that pupils are kept safe. The school has suitable facilities to care for sick and injured pupils. Anti-bullying measures are robust, and the school responds appropriately to the rare incidents that occur.
6. Boarding staff care for boarders well. Accommodation is comfortable and well maintained. The school has effective procedures to listen to pupils' views. Boarders are occasionally frustrated with some of the boarding rules and their inability to escalate their views. The school revised these procedures during the inspection.
7. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. The safeguarding policy reflects the most recent statutory guidance and is available on the school's website. Staff are well trained in their safeguarding responsibilities. Safeguarding leaders keep thorough records and maintain close relationships with local safeguarding partners. A suitable curriculum ensures that pupils know how to stay safe. Recruitment checks are robust and are recorded appropriately.

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 and managers should ensure that:

- the new careers education programme is embedded so that pupils are better informed for their future choices
- pupils' individual plans and strategies are followed and used in all subjects throughout the curriculum so that teaching consistently meets the needs of pupils who have SEND
- the quality of teaching is developed further so that the very strong practice evident in some subjects is more widely spread across all subjects, in order to further improve pupils' progress
- procedures are embedded which ensure that boarders can escalate their concerns where necessary.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Governors ensure that leaders and managers have the required knowledge and skills and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, including actively promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Governors assure themselves that the Standards are met by routine scrutiny and monitoring of the school's practice and procedures, and through receiving regular reports. Governors provide appropriate challenge and support to the school's leaders.
9. Executives of the foundation with specialist knowledge and skills, such as in safeguarding and recruitment, liaise well with leaders and governors in order to support them to fulfil their responsibilities.
10. Leaders ensure that the school is a strong community of confident pupils who are environmentally and globally aware, in line with the aims of the school. Pupils come from a range of ethnic backgrounds, and many are from overseas. The curriculum focuses on ensuring pupils develop a strong understanding of the wider world. As a result, pupils develop great understanding and respect for the different groups of people in society.
11. Leaders regularly check how well the school is doing and have appropriate monitoring processes in place. They have an accurate view of its strengths and what could be developed further. They use this understanding to inform their plans for the school, both in the short and longer term. Governors ensure that the school is sufficiently well resourced for these plans to be executed successfully.
12. Complaints are managed appropriately, and thorough records are kept. Complaints are dealt with within the timeframes stated in the school's policy. Parents receive reports regularly about pupils' progress and attainment. All other required information is made available to parents, largely through the school's informative website.
13. The thoughtful approach by school leaders has ensured that the school has been successful in introducing co-education to the sixth form. Unexpected consequences of this development have been mitigated, including by developing the curriculum and the educational and boarding facilities. This has added beneficially to the ethos and nature of the sixth form.
14. The management of risks relating to educational and recreational activities, school grounds and premises and the planning for trips is effective. Leaders have identified the risks around the ancient and extensive campus well and have taken decisions which mitigate the possibility of harm. Risk assessments are reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant to changing demands. Records kept about accidents are thorough and up to date.
15. The school has an appropriate accessibility plan that is implemented effectively.

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

16. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. Leaders have planned the curriculum effectively so that it has appropriate breadth. The wide range of subjects meets the needs of the small, but diverse pupil body. The curriculum is underpinned by its 'perspectives' programme which promotes a wider understanding of the complex ideas that shape the world and the development of key values such as internationalism and service.
18. The learning support department provides effective individual and specialist support for pupils who have SEND. Where teachers make use of the detailed learning support plans provided, pupils achieve well and are confident about their learning. However, at times, staff do not use the plans well enough, and the agreed strategies are not followed fully. When this is the case, pupils' progress slows because support is less well matched to their needs. Overall, pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
19. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive high-quality support. EAL provision is extensive, ambitious and meets the needs of individual pupils. Innovative teaching makes good use of the latest technology and extends to helping pupils develop their English in specialist subject areas. The EAL department supports teachers with advice on teaching strategies so that pupils who speak EAL develop their fluency in English rapidly.
20. Teachers are knowledgeable in their specialisms and ensure that pupils' work is of a high standard. They provide constructive feedback, which pupils use to correct and improve their work. Pupils often receive tailored individualised support. This helps them to produce high-quality work, such as when working towards the extended project qualification.
21. Teaching is more effective in some subjects than others. In the stronger subjects, such as science, the well-planned practical and experimental work helps pupils to test out concepts they have learned about. In drama pupils are given high-quality opportunities to rehearse and perform, which help them to make rapid progress and attain particularly well. In stronger subjects, teachers aim high, challenging the more-able pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding still further.
22. In mathematics and Spanish, teachers are less ambitious for pupils and have lower expectations of them. Pupils are given work to do that does not stretch the more-able pupils as well as in other subjects. In addition, some teachers do not choose the most effective ways to teach pupils about some aspects of their subjects. Where this is the case, pupils engage less enthusiastically and make slower progress.
23. The structure of the boarding routine has a positive impact on boarders' learning. They benefit from having set times where, under supervision, they can access help to complete homework tasks. This helps them to achieve better outcomes.
24. Leaders carefully assess and monitor pupils' progress, which is good overall from their starting points. Pupils achieve well in public examinations. The vast majority of pupils go on to their first-choice destination when they leave the school.
25. Leaders provide an activities programme which is wide-ranging and supports the school's aim to educate pupils holistically, as well as academically. Staff give generously of their time to support and lead activities. Pupils participate enthusiastically and achieve well in a range of high-quality activities. Boarders enjoy frequent trips out of school and numerous on-site activities, both at

weekends and weekday evenings. These provide opportunities for rest and respite, as well as for boarders to come together socially.

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

26. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

27. The culture of the school promotes mutual respect. As a result, pupils willingly follow the school's code of values and behave well. They rightly feel that the school and their boarding houses are safe places which value them as individuals. Pupils are taught effectively about fundamental British values such as individual liberty and the rule of law. Pupils show respect for others and celebrate people's difference. Consequently, pupils are confident and enjoy good relationships with each other, including across age groups.
28. The school provides a wide range of resources and facilities to promote physical activity. For example, a state-of-the-art gym has recently opened, to better serve pupils in contributing to their physical and mental wellbeing. A dedicated wellbeing centre, run by pupil wellbeing ambassadors, is open to all. It provides a welcoming space for those who want to take time to pause and reflect during the school day. The well-maintained grounds are enjoyed and appreciated by pupils, particularly the resident deer whose presence contributes to pupils' awe of the natural world around them.
29. Leaders place a great deal of importance on pupils' social and emotional development. As a result, the amount of curriculum time allocated to PSHE and RSE in all year groups is extensive. These programmes of study are wide ranging and comprehensive for all ages across the school and cover issues such as responsibility and consent. The perspectives programme is cross curricular and encourages pupils to deepen their thinking and apply their knowledge to real-life situations. Consequently, pupils of all ages have a good understanding of the content covered in these courses.
30. Bullying incidents are prevented as far as practicable. Incidents are rare and, when they do occur, leaders investigate them thoroughly and deal with them decisively. Anti-bullying ambassadors have a high profile. They help to support pupils and reinforce the message that bullying is not tolerated.
31. The school site is secure and well maintained. Pupils are well supervised both during the day and in boarding time.
32. Admission and attendance registers are maintained accurately and absences are followed up promptly.
33. A well-qualified nurse cares for pupils who are unwell, and boarders are also able to access care from their house parents. Pupils with specific medical needs are identified and staff are made aware of them. Many staff have suitable first aid qualifications.
34. Measures to prevent and respond to the risk of fire are effective. Fire evacuation practices take place regularly, at night as well as during the day. Pupils know the routine they must follow in the event of an emergency.
35. Boarders are looked after well. Food is varied, nutritious, tasty and sufficient, and snacks are available to pupils outside of mealtimes. Boarding houses are comfortable, spacious and well maintained. Bathroom, shower and toilet facilities are sufficient and clean.

36. Leaders have successfully introduced co-education to the sixth form. The male pupils have been welcomed and made to feel part of a close-knit community.
37. There are many effective avenues through which the school listens and responds to pupils' concerns. However, boarders occasionally express frustration at some of the rules and regimentation of aspects of the boarding provision and their inability to escalate their views. During the inspection, leaders clarified the procedures available to boarders to provide a more systematic process for their concerns to be addressed.

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

- 38. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

39. The 'perspectives' programme, which unites areas of the school's pastoral curriculum including PSHE and RSE, allows pupils to gain a wider understanding of the world. Because of its cross-curricular nature, the programme impacts positively on learning across all areas of the curriculum. Pupils apply their learning to 'real-life' situations. Through the opportunities the programme provides, for example to explore global issues, extend pupils' thinking so that they learn to be tolerant of each other. This is reinforced by the international and culturally diverse nature of the school and the boarding houses in particular.
40. Boarding gives pupils a valuable preparation for university life. They are enabled to develop independence, maturity and confidence, and learn valuable social skills by living together in a supportive environment.
41. Teaching frequently explores moral issues such as gun control, immigration and abortion. Pupils engage in debate enthusiastically. Pupils who speak EAL were able to discuss the issues and dangers around gender stereotyping and the perspectives of different cultures. Consequently, pupils are well informed about local and global issues. Pupils live out the strong positive values of the school in doing what is right and being ready to take on responsibility.
42. They have developed the PSHE curriculum to introduce more age-appropriate careers education throughout the school and to ensure co-ordination and collaboration between careers education in PSHE lessons, morning registration, weekly tutorials and timetabled 'Perspectives' lessons. Between all these elements, the planned provision is now thorough and well targeted. The programme is, however, still in its infancy, and leaders recognise the need to embed and develop it.
43. The school places particular emphasis on the principles of internationalism, democracy, environment, adventure, leadership and service. For example, pupils work together well in ensembles in music. Pupils readily embrace these values. 'Model United Nations' is a popular activity in all year groups and promotes interest in internationalism. Tree-planting programmes support the environment. Leaders encourage participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, because of its coherence with the values of the school. Take-up of the scheme is strong, with about a third of the current sixth form currently preparing for the gold award.
44. The 'perspectives' programme prepares pupils to apply their knowledge to real life situations. It includes skills that range from managing personal finances to changing a car wheel. In business studies, pupils show a good understanding of economic principles such as market failure and its social impact. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for their lives after school and in future British society.

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

- 45. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Safeguarding

46. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders understand the thresholds for liaison with external agencies and know the referral pathways. The school maintains close relationships with children's services and the local authority designated officer. Leaders maintain detailed safeguarding records and store them securely. Child protection concerns are acted upon promptly and appropriately.
47. The safeguarding policy reflects the most recent statutory guidance and is effectively implemented. It is available to staff, parents and pupils on the school website and contains all the necessary contact details. A suitably detailed summary document is also issued to visitors.
48. All staff receive suitable safeguarding training when they join the school. This training is regularly updated. Staff with designated safeguarding lead responsibilities are appropriately trained for the role. They know and understand the risks to pupils, such as online safety, and how to mitigate them. There is a suitable curriculum in place to help prevent cyber bullying and ensure pupils know how to stay safe online.
49. Leaders keep a suitable record of appointments. Governors and executives of the foundation carefully monitor appointment procedures. Safer recruitment checks are completed for staff, volunteers and governors in adherence with statutory guidance.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 50. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	Cobham Hall
Department for Education number	886/6044
Registered charity number	1064758
Address	Cobham Hall Brewers Road Cobham Kent DA12 3BL
Phone number	01474 823371
Email address	enquiries@cobhamhall.com
Website	www.cobhamhall.com
Proprietor	The Mill Hill School Foundation
Chair	Mr Elliot Lipton
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Barrett
Age range	11 to 19
Number of pupils	131
Number of boarding pupils	33
Date of previous inspection	28 September to 1 October 2021

Information about the school

51. Cobham Hall is an independent day and boarding school for pupils aged between 11 and 19 years. It is a registered charity and part of the Mill Hill Foundation, overseen by a governing body who are also the trustees. The school opened in 1962 in Cobham Hall, a Tudor manor house in 150 acres of parkland. It is a member of the Round Square organisation. Since the previous inspection, the school has begun to admit male pupils into the sixth form and has opened a boarding house to provide accommodation for some of them.
52. The school has three boarding houses on site: one for female pupils in years 7 to 11, one for female pupils in the sixth form and the other for male pupils.
53. The school has identified 43 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
54. English is an additional language for 15 pupils.
55. The school states its aims are to provide excellence in education and bring out the potential of every pupil. It seeks to create confident, successful, healthy pupils who lead happy and fulfilling lives. The school strives to establish a strong sense of community and environmental awareness.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

5 to 7 December 2023

56. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

57. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussion with the foundation's chief executive officer
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

58. 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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