

School inspection report

10 October 2023 to 12 October 2023

Buckswood School

Broomham Hall
Rye Road
Guestling
East Sussex
TN35 4LT

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, together with leaders and managers throughout the school, ensures that pupils receive a broad and balanced education, which meets pupils' needs, particularly with respect to their proficiency in English upon entry for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). As a result, pupils with EAL make rapid progress in their acquisition of spoken and written English, allowing them to quickly access the curriculum.
2. The school has developed an extensive programme of trips and visits to enrich the experience of boarders at weekends and during holidays. These opportunities are open to all and a small number of day pupils join in.
3. Leaders and managers are knowledgeable about their responsibility to actively promote pupils' wellbeing. They implement strategies effectively so that pupils, in keeping with the aims of the school, which are to encourage pupils to 'strive to be the best that they can, discover where their talents lie and explore the world around them'.
4. The development of a group of advisory governors has established oversight of all school processes and procedures and improved the systems for accountability of leaders at all levels. This enables the school to continue to meet the Standards, including those relating to boarding, as well as to develop a coherent strategic vision for the future.
5. Effective use of performance data gathered on entry, allied to careful tracking and monitoring, ensures that pupils of all abilities make good progress in relation to their starting points. The support given to the significant number of pupils with EAL is comprehensive and enables pupils to integrate quickly and make good progress.
6. Teaching is well planned and enables pupils with differing needs to engage positively with their learning. Feedback to pupils is thorough and helpful, which enables pupils to improve. Individual support is available for all subjects during the afternoon access sessions. Occasionally, teaching does not meet the needs of all pupils. This limits progress for a small minority of pupils in some lessons.
7. Leaders actively promote pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing through the twelve pillars of the school's educational philosophy. Well-planned personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) programmes include age-appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE). As a result, there are few incidents of bullying or poor behaviour. Supervision arrangements in boarding, and on trips and visits, to ensure the health and safety of pupils, are thorough and effective. These help to promote the high standard of behaviour in the school.
8. Leaders, teachers and residential staff effectively promote the integration of pupils within and across the boarding houses. Day pupils are fully involved in the life of the school through the house structure. As a result, relationships between pupils at the school are harmonious and highly respectful.
9. Leaders and staff actively promote a culture that readily embraces diversity. Pupils have a secure understanding of and respect for differences among people. This promotion of respect is developed further within the PSHE and RSE programmes.

10. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to contribute positively to the lives of others, which they accept with enthusiasm and commitment. Pupils willingly help others in their roles as prefects and buddies, and during their charitable and service endeavours.
11. A suitable careers programme is in place, although it lacks the full involvement of subject leaders to enhance the programme further. Pupils are effectively prepared for each stage of their lives when choosing options for GCSE and sixth-form study and preparing for further education or employment.
12. Safeguarding policies and procedures are effective. Leaders have acted to create a wider safeguarding team within a wellbeing hub that assists communication between all those with pastoral responsibilities. Independent external advice is called upon effectively to oversee the work of the safeguarding team and to aid in the annual review of policy and procedures.

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

- Ensure that all teaching provides appropriate tasks and challenge to meet the needs of all pupils.
- Ensure that the careers programme has a greater input from all subject areas to enhance provision.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. Leaders and managers demonstrate good knowledge and skills and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Leaders ensure that the school's appropriate policies are implemented effectively. Staff training is frequent, well planned and thorough. For example, recent training has focused on the use of social media and the school's arrangements to monitor and filter internet access. The proprietor and leaders have a clear and ambitious vision of the school's future development, based on comprehensive and thoughtful self-evaluation.
14. The proprietor and leaders successfully meet the school's aims through an educational philosophy based on twelve pillars that include the promotion of internationalism, self-confidence, individuality and success. The proprietor and advisory governors work systematically to oversee leaders' work, providing appropriate levels of challenge when required. For example, a twice-termly meeting, between the governor with oversight of safeguarding and the school's wellbeing team, formally reviews the boarding provision.
15. Leaders engage effectively with pupils and parents through newsletters, the parent portal, student council and regular surveys. Frequent house-meetings promote integration and harmony amongst the many nationalities represented in the boarding houses. Leaders at all levels are successful in promoting fundamental British values, including respect for diversity and tolerance within a vibrant community where pupils can celebrate their own culture and identity.
16. Leaders provide a stimulating range of activities onsite and trips locally, elsewhere in the UK and overseas, for example, adventure activities such as surfing and skiing, and cultural visits including to Japan, Georgia and Edinburgh. Some pupils learn to ride in the school's stables and others have refurbished a primary school in Eswatini, Africa.
17. Leaders take a thorough and proportionate approach to the identification of risks and their management. They identify contextual risks, including any unintended consequences, to allow pupils to participate positively in all aspects of school life. This comprehensive risk assessment policy gives staff clear direction about minimising risk and this is translated into thorough risk assessments that cover all aspects of the school's operation, including premises and accommodation, educational trips, recruitment and potentially high-risk activities including, for example, horse riding and archery.
18. Since the previous inspection, the proprietor and senior leaders have expanded the school's middle leadership with clearly identified roles and responsibilities. This has included additional staffing for the wellbeing hub and year group leaders to coordinate and develop the pastoral system and oversee the PSHE and RSE programmes. A group of independent advisory governors is now established to improve the proprietor's oversight and accountability of senior leaders. For example, they have reviewed safeguarding processes and the code of conduct for adults who are resident onsite.
19. Leaders of boarding give clear direction to boarding staff and regular training to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles effectively. The proprietor and leaders ensure that the boarding houses and boarding activities are at the centre of the life of the school whilst ensuring

that day pupils can take part in all activities. Academic and boarding staff communicate well regarding boarders' needs, wellbeing and academic progress.

20. Academic and residential staff are readily accessible to parents including online and any concerns are addressed promptly. Complaints from parents are responded to appropriately and in a timely way. Regular reports to parents on pupils' progress are helpful and informative. Leaders are reviewing the reporting processes in response to parents' feedback. Leaders ensure that other relevant information is made available to parents via the school website. A suitable accessibility plan is in place that meets the requirements of the Equality Act.

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. Subject leaders plan and implement the curriculum effectively to ensure that pupils have experience of all areas of learning and develop their skills and knowledge well. The curriculum meets pupils' needs and promotes proficiency in English for pupils with EAL. Programmes to develop pupils' linguistic, literacy and numeracy skills are well developed. Pupils develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills effectively in many areas including the humanities, sciences and the theory of knowledge component of the International Baccalaureate (IB). Pupils respond enthusiastically to opportunities to explore their creativity in art and technology. They develop their individual talents in music and drama including in drama productions and ensembles such as the Pipe Band.
22. Leaders ensure that schemes of work are matched to the ages and aptitudes of pupils. Clear targets are set in all subject areas linked to a newly developed system for assessment and tracking that identifies pupils who may be falling behind and need additional support. Teachers evaluate work and give regular and clear oral and written feedback to help pupils improve their work. Pupils appreciate the helpful subject clinics and support sessions that are well attended at the end of the day. Boarders' prep sessions are effectively supervised to ensure that pupils use their time productively.
23. Teachers have good subject knowledge and convey it effectively to pupils with a range of abilities and proficiency in English. As a result, lessons are well-planned and resources adapted to meet the language needs of pupils. Appropriate use is made of technology to aid understanding, including as a tool for translation. Pupils access virtual teaching rooms where they can share resources and work collaboratively. Leaders consider how artificial intelligence can enhance learning further.
24. Most teaching stimulates pupils' curiosity, developing independence and confidence. Teaching and learning strategies are discussed and shared within departments and there is a growing number of initiatives to allow best practice to be shared across departments but these are not yet fully embedded. As a result, some teaching lacks variation in tasks to meet the needs of all pupils. A cross-curricular Buckswood Certificate is being piloted in Year 9 on the theme of migration, allowing pupils to develop a range of transferrable skills, including the ability to hypothesise, research and analyse information from a range of sources.
25. The majority of pupils attain well. However, levels of progress are not consistently good for all pupils or across all subject areas. A high proportion of pupils in the school have EAL and their progress in acquiring language skills is rapid and enables them to access GCSE and sixth-form programmes quickly. Pupils with SEND receive tailored support, which helps them to progress. Pupils benefit from the close working relationship between subject teachers and SEND staff.
26. Leaders have developed a broad and varied extra-curricular programme. Numerous day trips and visits support the curriculum effectively. Pupils enjoy residential trips within the UK and overseas as well as a good range of onsite activities. Boarders take part enthusiastically in a range of activities both in the evenings and at weekends. Pupils understand that these activities promote their wellbeing and are mindful of the need to balance keeping busy with having quality free time to relax and socialise with friends.

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

27. The PHSE programme considers the ages, cultural backgrounds and needs of those who are new to the school. It reinforces the school's philosophy, especially relating to tolerance, spirituality, self-confidence, self-discipline, internationalism and wellbeing. Mutual respect is evident in pupils' relationships with each other, and adults foster a spirit of understanding and harmony between pupils of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. This allows boarders to settle quickly and contributes significantly to their emotional wellbeing.
28. The RSE programme is effective in reinforcing the pervading mutual respect in the school community for race and gender. Leaders consult with and involve parents in the development of the programme and check pupils' understanding before and after each unit of learning.
29. The Buckswood Sports Academies provide high-quality coaching and promote achievement in soccer, rugby, golf, horse riding and netball. Leaders have expanded sporting provision to widen opportunity and promote enjoyment of a number of sporting and recreational activities suited to all levels of ability. Activities include such varied pursuits as fencing, yoga and cricket as well as some curriculum enrichment such as Chinese, mathematics and creative writing clubs. Leaders have found some gaps in the programme and plan to engage academic and boarding staff in the development of further opportunities.
30. Teachers, supported by leaders, have high expectations of behaviour that are set out clearly in the code of conduct. Incidents of bullying are rare and staff manage bullying or poor behaviour sensitively and well. Pupils behave extremely well in the classroom and around the campus. They are polite and courteous towards each other as well as to staff and visitors.
31. Boarding aims and routines are communicated effectively to parents and understood by pupils. Pupils in boarding feel that staff are readily available, know them well and treat them as individuals. The effective management of the boarding houses is aided by the strong relationships between age-groups and the positive mentoring of older pupils. The houses are suitably maintained and equipped with adequate bathroom, toilet and common room facilities as well as kitchens for the preparation of light meals. Pupils can contact home easily and boarders' views are actively sought and acted upon through house meetings and committees, for example, in the choice of weekend activities and house events.
32. New boarders receive a comprehensive programme of induction that includes arrangements for the security of personal possessions, medical support and the weekly laundry provision. Boarders are provided with nutritionally balanced meals and a variety of snacks is readily available. Boarders confirmed that they can contact a member of staff, including at night, and that they are comfortable to contact the school's independent listener should they wish to do so.
33. Well-qualified staff in the medical centre provide care for day pupils and boarders who become unwell or who have specific health needs. These members of staff have a key role within the school's wellbeing and safeguarding team. Effective liaison between residential staff, teachers and the medical centre ensures that boarders' health needs are always met.

34. The proprietor and leaders ensure that health and safety practices are implemented and checked effectively. The school engages external agencies to assess the risk of fire and advise on mitigation measures. Fire evacuation drills take place termly, including in boarding time, and staff receive regular training. The attendance and admissions registers are kept appropriately. Staff diligently follow up the destinations of pupils who leave and are removed from the admission register.

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

35. Pupils' social and economic development is supported in the curriculum and extra-curriculum with a focus on individual talents and aspirations alongside the promotion of manners, self-confidence, teamwork and internationalism. Pupils' contribution to society is actively promoted through the core value of charity and service. This is implemented through the fundraising and voluntary service initiatives in support of local, national and international charities.
36. Leaders provide numerous opportunities for pupils to learn about society and the wider world through a programme of world-wide cultural trips. Visits to public institutions such as law courts and parliament, and enrichment opportunities including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme, Model United Nations and the debating society, reinforce preparation for life in British society. The international nature of the pupil intake is celebrated to create an environment in which healthy, respectful debate abounds and pupils freely celebrate their diverse cultural backgrounds. Both day pupils and international boarders identified the multi-national environment as an extremely positive feature of the school. Pupils develop a good knowledge of public institutions and, by the time they leave, pupils are well-prepared for their adult lives including for the majority that proceed to higher education in the UK.
37. Pupils clearly distinguish right from wrong and fully understand the role of law in resolving disputes or addressing wrongdoing. Pupils comfortably accept that others may have different views and opinions and engage fully in democratic processes such as the student committee and house meetings.
38. Leaders provide an appropriate careers guidance programme that is focused on working with each individual pupil in the senior school and sixth form to identify their talents, interests and aspirations. Pupils are clear about their predicted levels of attainment and can make informed decisions about higher education destinations and possible career pathways. This is supported by visits to workplaces, talks from previous students or representatives from a variety of professions as well as through attending university open days. Pupils are readily able to seek advice from senior staff and tutors but there is limited input from subject staff to enhance the programme.
39. Leaders prioritise participation and contribution. Despite the relatively brief period of time that many spend at the school, pupils are highly socially aware and engage well within the school and local communities as well as supporting charitable work in the UK and overseas. The newly extended prefect team is highly effective in the discharge of their duties. Each prefect takes responsibility for the promotion of one of the twelve educational pillars such as internationalism or spirituality. Prefects in boarding take responsibility effectively to help staff with routines such as room inspections, supervision in common rooms and at house meetings and house events.
40. Sixth-form pupils act as mentors for newly arrived pupils and discharge their responsibilities with great maturity. Pupils volunteer as an element of the DofE award or the service element of the International Baccalaureate and contribute wholeheartedly to charitable fundraising efforts including an annual visit to a village in Eswatini. Pupils enthusiastically support the school's

numerous sustainability initiatives including energy generation, biomass, water filtration and recycling as well as helping with the harvest of fruit from the school's orchard.

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

41. Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils are effective and have been strengthened by the external oversight and advice provided by the board of advisory governors. The proprietor and senior leaders have acted to ensure that the designated safeguarding lead and their deputies have the time and resources needed to ensure that safeguarding and welfare practice and procedures are effective. Leaders and staff, including those in boarding, actively promote a vigilant culture of safeguarding and implement procedures effectively. Leaders including safeguarding leads and the extended safeguarding team have effective relationships with external agencies to ensure that advice is looked for and acted upon. Any referrals to the local area designated officer, children's services and the police are made promptly.
42. The school's safeguarding policy and other associated policies are updated in a timely manner, have full regard to the most recent guidance, and are implemented effectively. The staff code of conduct and guidelines for residential staff are appropriate and are regularly reviewed to reflect the context of the school.
43. Leaders ensure that all staff and volunteers receive safeguarding training when they join the school and it is updated at regular intervals. Staff, including those in boarding, have a secure knowledge of child protection procedures including those for online safety and have a heightened understanding of the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. Leaders have established suitable procedures to monitor and filter the school's information technology systems including access to the internet.
44. Staff understand how to recognise a safeguarding concern and how to report any concerns with respect to both pupils and staff. Staff provide pupils with clear and thoughtful advice on personal safety through the school's PSHE programme. The safeguarding team keep careful records so that they can closely monitor pupils for whom there is cause for concern. The weekly wellbeing meetings bring together the safeguarding team, medical staff and pastoral leaders to discuss strategies to address any issues that may emerge. Staff are kept informed including at the weekly staff briefings, if appropriate.
45. Leaders monitor behavioural, health, safeguarding and other records to identify any patterns and trends so that emerging issues are identified early. Residential boarding staff liaise closely with tutors and pastoral teams to ensure that information is shared with respect to any concerns that may arise.
46. Pupils have responsible adults that they can speak to and pupils say that they would have no hesitation in reporting any concerns they may have with respect to their own or others' welfare.
47. Safer recruitment checks are completed for all staff, volunteers, the proprietor and advisory governors and a suitable record of these checks is accurately maintained.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant standards are met

School details

School	Buckswood School
Department for Education number	845/6031
Address	Broomham Hall Rye Road Guestling East Sussex TN35 4LT
Website	www.buckswood.co.uk
Proprietor	Buckswood School Limited
Principal	Kevin Samson
Age range	10 to 19
Number of pupils	289
Number of boarding pupils	232
Date of previous inspection	24 March 2022

Information about the school

48. Buckswood School is a co-educational boarding and day school located on a rural site close to Hastings, East Sussex. The school is owned by Buckswood School Limited, whose director is responsible for the oversight of the school with the assistance of an advisory governing body. The school is led by the principal and there is also an academic principal responsible the academic management of the school. The school is organised into three sections: the junior school, for pupils up to Year 9; the senior school, for Years 10 and 11; and the sixth form.
49. The large majority of boarders are from overseas representing more than 30 nationalities and are accommodated in seven houses within the school campus.
50. The school has identified 26 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
51. English is an additional language for 173 pupils.
52. The school states that its aims are to enable pupils to be the best that they can, discover where their talents lie and explore the world around them.

Inspection details

Inspection dates 10 to 12 October 2023

53. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.
54. Inspection activities included:
- visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work
 - discussions with the proprietor, senior leaders, staff and groups of pupils
 - tours of all accommodation for boarders
 - scrutiny of policies, documentation and schemes of work relating to all aspects of the school's provision.
55. Inspectors 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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For more information, please visit isi.net