



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

BATTLE ABBEY SCHOOL

MARCH 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Battle Abbey School			
DfE Number	845/6018			
Registered charity number	306998			
Address	Battle Abbey School High Street Battle East Sussex TN33 0AD			
Telephone number	01424 772385			
Email address	info@battleabbey.school.com			
Headmaster	Mr David Clark			
Chair of governors	Mr Peter Dass			
Age range	2 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	417			
	Boys	223	Girls	194
	Day pupils	364	Boarders	53
	Nursery	40	Prep	81
	Seniors	194	Sixth Form	102
Inspection dates	8 to 9 March 2017			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any unmet standards identified at their previous inspection.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended house meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Fiona McGill	Reporting inspector
Mrs Valerie Clark	Accompanying inspector
Mrs Kerrie Daunter	Team inspector (Deputy head academic and head of pre-prep, IAPS school)
Mr Richard Palmer	Team inspector (Head, Society of Heads school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Battle Abbey School is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged between 2 and 18 years. It was founded in Bexhill in 1912 as a family-owned finishing school for senior girls. The school moved to Battle Abbey in 1922 and became co-educational in 1989. The school is registered as a charity and a company, limited by guarantee, and is administered by a board of governors known as the Full Court. The senior school is located at Battle Abbey and the prep school and nursery are located on separate sites approximately 8 miles away in Bexhill-on-Sea.
- 1.2 In 2014, the school opened a new boarding house for sixth form pupils, and, in 2016, acquired further premises which provide additional sixth form teaching space.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to promote a nurturing close-knit family atmosphere and inspire pupils to strive for excellence. It seeks to acknowledge each individual's achievements and promote balanced social development through sensitive pastoral care. The school intends to prepare pupils for life after school by providing an all-round education that develops their self-confidence and empathy, and enables them to contribute positively to the world.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average in the junior and senior schools, and broadly average in the sixth form. The school has identified 48 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, anxiety disorders and dyspraxia, 25 of whom receive additional specialist support. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 33 pupils, 30 of whom receive additional support. Data used by the school have identified 15 pupils as being the most able in year 11 and provision is modified for them.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was a standard inspection in October and November 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Fully develop systems for monitoring pupils' progress in the prep school, to improve further the standards achieved.
 - Ensure that the whole-school marking policy is more clearly defined and consistently implemented, so that all pupils know the steps they need to take to improve their learning.
 - Develop a cohesive system of careers provision in the senior school, so that all pupils have a clear idea of the possibilities available to them.
 - Devise a whole-school system of appraisal.
 - In the EYFS, ensure that all staff use open-ended questions, in order to elicit fuller responses from children and enhance their spoken language.

- 1.7 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspection.
- 1.8 The recommendations of the intermediate boarding inspection in January 2013 were:
- Develop a more consistent procedure for ensuring that all boarders have the opportunity to have a drink and snack in the evening.
 - Ensure that suitable privacy is provided with appropriate window covers in the girls' shower rooms.
 - Clarify to all staff the lines of senior management in charge of boarding.
- 1.9 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspection.
- 1.10 The recommendations of the intermediate Early Years Foundation Stage inspection in January 2013 were:
- Share the best practice already within the setting to provide suitable challenge in extending children's learning through creative problem solving.
 - Provide guidance in reports on areas for development and how to support learning at home
- 1.11 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspection.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes towards their work and are inquisitive and curious.
- Pupils make good and sometimes excellent progress and have an extremely good understanding of what they need to do to improve.
- Pupils' results are at least in line with national averages for maintained schools, with results in national tests at age 11 and at GCSE above average.
- Pupils' independent learning skills are not always developed as strongly as possible.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils co-operate exceedingly well with each other and with staff.
- Pupils are extremely self-confident and are proud of their achievements.
- Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of activities and demonstrate strong leadership skills and a substantial sense of responsibility towards others.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement:

- Provide greater opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills, particularly in the prep school.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 In the prep school, the school measures attainment using national curriculum tests. In the years 2013 to 2014, the results were above the national average for maintained schools. In the years 2013 to 2015, the most recent years for which comparative data are available, performance at GCSE was above the national average for maintained schools. Results at IGCSE have been similar to worldwide norms. In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2013 to 2015 have been in line with the national average for sixth formers in maintained schools. Sixth form pupils progress to a range of prestigious universities and pupils commented how much they appreciate the excellent advice and support they receive throughout the application process. In 2016, pupils' GCSE and A-level results improved significantly following the introduction of additional workshops and one-to-one support prior to the examinations. In the first cohort taking the Extended Project Qualification, pupils achieved a very high number of results graded A* to B, encouraged by the commitment and inspiration provided by their teachers. Older pupils participate enthusiastically in the new programme led by school leaders and introduced to support the more able. The school fully meets its aim to acknowledge the achievements of each individual and inspire pupils to achieve their potential.
- 3.3 Pupils throughout the school develop a wide range of knowledge and skills which they apply confidently to other areas of the curriculum. Pupils in the nursery develop good scientific understanding, with one pupil explaining confidently that if they put ice on a radiator it would melt because of the warmth. Pupils are curious and keen to extend their understanding of the world around them, taking full advantage of the opportunities afforded to them. Pupils' excellent creative work in the senior school demonstrates the highly effective development of their artistic skills as a result of the detailed and encouraging marking of their earlier work. In a Year 8 drama lesson, pupils used their clear understanding of Shakespearean texts to construct and perform confidently their own verses based on modern life. A very small minority of pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire disagreed that most lessons were interesting. However, pupils who spoke to the inspectors spoke positively about the teaching that they receive, and lesson observations demonstrated high levels of interest and engagement.
- 3.4 Pupils are confident learners who benefit greatly from the targeted support provided by their teachers, who know them well. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make very good progress as a result of the use made by all teachers of the excellent system of monitoring and target setting introduced following a restructure of the SEND and EAL provision. In one lesson, the use of gentle coaxing and prolific praise enabled some anxious pupils to overcome their hesitation to participate in group feedback. Pupils in the prep school make good progress as a result of being taught by subject specialists who share their enthusiasm with the pupils. In the senior school, Latin has been introduced as a challenge for the more able pupils who respond extremely well. Boarders make very good progress and, in discussions with the inspectors, praised the willingness of academic staff to provide additional support at weekends for both themselves and day pupils. Most parents and pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school gave pupils the opportunity to learn and make good progress.
- 3.5 Pupils throughout the school are extremely articulate. In a prep school assembly, pupils leading the assembly spoke with clarity and confidence. Pupils understand the importance of writing full sentences that are well-constructed and correctly punctuated. Pupils in the senior school value the many opportunities to develop their communication skills. For example, pupils in the

debating club enjoyed a lively discussion about stereotyping teenagers and were able to improve their debating skills as a result of skilful guidance from their teacher. In group work, pupils share their ideas and listen carefully to those of others. In a Year 8 modern foreign languages lesson, pupils were extremely confident in practising the rules of grammar which they had just learnt.

- 3.6 Pupils use and apply their strong mathematical skills across the curriculum with high levels of confidence and ability. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), children develop numeracy skills by counting apparatus into boxes, and in the prep school, pupils creatively use a range of strategies to help them solve problems. Pupils confidently identify their own mistakes and can correct their errors with a high level of accuracy. In interviews, pupils said that when staff relate theory to practice, the reasoning behind the mathematics is evident, making it easier for them to understand. Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills benefit from the discrete ICT lessons in the prep school and younger years in the senior school, with touch typing taught from Year 3. Prep school pupils apply various technologies to enhance their learning, as demonstrated when they create presentations and compose music. GCSE ICT pupils show a high degree of competence in developing their independent projects.
- 3.7 Pupils in the prep school are able to make searching enquiries and show their ability to analyse when asked open-ended questions. In a history lesson, senior school pupils benefitted from focused note-taking, guided by their teacher, to develop an excellent study habit. Excellent lesson planning in a Year 7 English lesson enabled pupils of all abilities to demonstrate a very skilled analysis of language and the ability to synthesise ideas about characterisation. Pupils in Year 11 compared three poems effectively through the innovative use of a Venn diagram. Pupils are enthusiastic in their desire to further develop their study skills and appreciate and respect the teaching techniques which staff adapt for individual pupils. The provision of additional study space for sixth form pupils enables them to use their free time more effectively. Pupils actively engage in dialogue with their tutors about their academic performance and how they can improve. However, pupils' independent learning skills are not always developed as strongly as possible, particularly in the prep school.
- 3.8 Pupils across the school enjoy considerable success in sporting, drama, creative writing, public speaking and music competitions, both locally and nationally. Prep school pupils compete in national swimming competitions for small schools and achieve success at a high level in a local music festival. Significant success is achieved in the creative arts with pupils' work exhibited in the local community and recognised nationally. Pupils are enthusiastic in their support for the school choirs, with a significant number performing at a very high level. Many pupils play instruments at the highest grades with some taking part in a national youth orchestra programme. Older pupils develop their confidence and gain further skills through their participation in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, achieving not only bronze and silver awards but also a significantly high number of gold awards for a school of this size. The school dance company, in a joint venture with the ICT department, was selected to perform in a prestigious national event at a London museum. Boarders appreciate the range of activities available to them.
- 3.9 Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. Pupils appreciate the supportive atmosphere in lessons, where well-planned activities enable them to work both independently and collaboratively as appropriate to the task. For example, during an English lesson, pupils of all abilities contributed strongly to the exploration of a challenging text, knowing that they would not be judged by their peers. In a modern foreign language lesson, pupils spontaneously extended the task by writing more complex sentences. The commitment of teachers, who are extremely knowledgeable about their pupils and support their individual needs, gives pupils

confidence to experiment with their own ideas. In the prep school, pupils settle quickly to their work and show great perseverance and pride when they achieve their goals. They respond positively to the comments made by their teachers in their written work, both improving their work and correcting errors. When given the opportunity to engage in independent research, they do so with much enthusiasm but they would benefit from more opportunities to develop their independent thinking.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils reflect the very strong family ethos of the school, which permeates all aspects of school life. The size of the school ensures that pupils are known as individuals by the staff. Pupils are extremely self-confident, aware of their own abilities and able to identify those areas in which they need to improve. The highly effective tutor programme includes regular assessments and target setting, which the pupils value greatly. In the prep school, Year 6 pupils set challenging personal targets in English with the encouragement of their teacher. As part of the excellent 'Character Education Programme', pupils are encouraged to take risks and learn from their mistakes, thus developing their resilience and well-being. Pupils' transition between the different parts of the school is extremely well managed, providing pupils with confidence as they move seamlessly into Reception and from Year 6 to the senior school.
- 4.3 Pupils' decision-making skills are outstanding. In the prep school, pupils set their own challenging, yet realistic, personal targets, which they discussed maturely with inspectors. Reception pupils make independent decisions about their activities and are extremely self-assured in their surroundings. In the senior school, pupils make their own informed subject choices at GCSE and A-level with individual support from staff and excellent advice from the careers advice staff. In reviewing their mock examination results, Year 11 pupils shared their profound understanding that they can directly affect their examination results. Pupils are consulted by the school's leadership on matters such as sixth form uniform and school rules. Pupils are confident that their views are listened to and as a result they have a deep sense of inclusion, trust and respect.
- 4.4 Pupils' spiritual development is excellent. Prep school pupils are extremely curious and knowledgeable about the world around them as a result of their experiences at the woodland and beach learning environments, which promote a sense of awe and wonder. Some of the pupils were moved to write their own prayers in response to their experiences. A programme of thoughts for the week introduced in the prep school has enabled pupils to think deeply about themes such as selfishness. In the senior school, pupils strongly develop their spiritual awareness through weekly assemblies and 'mindfulness' sessions which are part of the thought provoking tutorial programme. Sixth form boarders take time to enjoy the space to reflect in the boarding house gardens. Pupils appreciate the non-material aspects of life and thrive as a result of their very high level of participation in the arts.
- 4.5 Pupils at all ages can distinguish between right and wrong, and this is reflected in the excellent behaviour seen throughout the school, which is in line with the school's ethos. Prep school pupils develop class charters, which are reinforced by the use of praise and encouragement. In the senior school, pupils accept responsibility for their own behaviour, regarding the rules as common sense. The family nature of the school engenders a positive atmosphere where pupils are challenged to reflect on any incidences of poor behaviour and consider what they should have done instead. On the rare occasions when they see poor behaviour, pupils have no hesitation in speaking to staff, who they see as open and approachable. All parents and most pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour.
- 4.6 Pupils' social development is outstanding. In the senior school, pupils have a profound understanding of the benefits of working collaboratively and appreciate that they can achieve more together than when they work alone. This was particularly evident in some exceptional four-part harmony choral work and in a paired analysis in English. Pupils work extremely well with others of different ages in house activities, as seen in a house quiz linked to World

Women's Day. Younger pupils support each other when working in pairs, and pupils in the youngest groups demonstrate an awareness of the needs of others in free activity sessions, for example, by helping other children to fasten their costume. When pupils work together they do so collaboratively and with great confidence. Induction activities contribute to helping overseas boarders to adapt to collaborative working. Many house activities involve mixed age group teams with pupils benefitting from working with older and younger pupils.

- 4.7 Pupils participate enthusiastically in the wide range of activities and opportunities available to them, and developing strong leadership skills and a substantial sense of responsibility towards others. They take personal pride in their contribution to the smooth running and supportive atmosphere that is central to the school. Prep school monitors, house captains, and buddies carry out their responsibilities very conscientiously, such as assisting Reception pupils. Prefects, known as guardians, bronzes and house captains, play an extremely active and integral role in leading the school, supporting the staff in carrying out duties and acting as excellent role models and mentors for younger pupils. Pupils are committed to helping others and throughout the school there is a high level of awareness of the needs of the local community. Pupils organise a wide range of fundraising events for charities chosen by the pupils, which are confidently led by senior pupils with staff giving generously of their time to support these initiatives. Choirs perform for the community; tea parties are hosted for the elderly and older pupils run a reading scheme with the local primary school.
- 4.8 Pupils are extremely proud of their own heritage and excited to learn about other cultures. In the prep school, pupils in Year 4 were fascinated by the art of Native Americans and examined the significance of how ideas are portrayed. The international boarders add a rich dimension to the senior school and their recent Chinese New Year assembly was thoughtfully delivered and extremely well received. Boarders are encouraged to spend time with day pupils during exeats, giving pupils an even greater appreciation of their different lifestyles. Pupils demonstrate substantial respect for the views of others through discussions within tutor time on thought-provoking topics, such as the consequences of the referendum on membership of the European Union, and proper responses to prejudice and discrimination. An overwhelming majority of parents and most pupils agreed that the school actively promoted tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- 4.9 Pupils show substantial understanding of how to stay safe and the importance of a healthy lifestyle, eating a balanced diet and taking regular exercise. The youngest pupils displayed a mature response and remained remarkably calm when the fire alarm sounded. All pupils display an appreciation of the need to keep fit and healthy. For example, senior school pupils participate enthusiastically in the sport programme, while boarders take part in a range of active activities in the evening, with all pupils appreciating the benefits of keeping healthy. Pupils in the sixth form react positively and with understanding to external speakers who talk about a variety of topics, including safe driving and mental health awareness. Pupils are confident in seeking advice from the welfare team who are always available to offer support and of whom pupils spoke very highly. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that they know how to keep safe online. The school fully meets its aim to provide an all-round education that develops pupils' self-confidence and empathy, and enables them to contribute positively to the world.