



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

BRUERN ABBEY SCHOOL

MAY 2017



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SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Bruern Abbey School			
DfE number	931/6106			
Address	Bruern Abbey School Chesterton Oxfordshire OX26 1UY			
Telephone number	01869 242448			
Email address	secretary@bruernabbey.org			
Headteacher	Mr John Floyd			
Proprietor	Bellevue Education			
Age range	8 to 14			
Number of pupils on roll	140			
	Boys	140	Girls	0
	Day pupils	40	Boarders	100
	Juniors	66	Seniors	74
Inspection dates	17 to 18 May 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 proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the boarding house, 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

Mr Desmond Dunne	Reporting inspector
Mrs Jane Merriman	Team inspector (Headteacher, IAPS school)
Mr Chris Wright	Team inspector for boarding (Headmaster, IAPS school)

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Bruern Abbey School is a boarding preparatory school for boys between the ages of 8 and 14 years. The school was founded in 1989 by the principal, and since 1996 it has specialised in the education of boys with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities, such as dyslexia. The school moved to its current location in Chesterton, Oxfordshire in 1999. It is housed in a late nineteenth-century manor house, and is set in parkland with space for games and country sports. Extensive refurbishment and development of facilities have taken place as numbers have risen. There is no formal board of governors, although the principal formally involves individuals from within and outside the school community in major decisions.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has built a new science laboratory and two further classrooms. The school has introduced Latin and drama to the curriculum. The school has also increased the proportion of dyslexia- and dyscalculia-trained teachers and increased the quantity and variety of sporting and extra-curricular activities.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The central aims of the school are to prepare pupils with special educational needs and/or difficulties and disabilities for the Common Entrance examination and to enable them to continue their education successfully in mainstream senior independent schools. The school seeks to restore self-belief within pupils who may have lost confidence in themselves, and also to enable them to enjoy a fully-rounded education and appreciate the cultural aspects of life. Emphasis is placed on the importance of living as a community.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Most pupils are White British from London and the home counties. About two-thirds board and one-third are day pupils. Seventeen pupils of the senior school have different or dual nationalities, representing nine different countries. Information provided by the school shows that all 140 pupils arrive at the school with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils require support with dyslexia and significant difficulties with speech, language, literacy and numeracy. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. There are 17 boys that receive support to help their language and literacy development.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Falcons	Year 4
Eagles and Owls	Year 5
Kestrels, Peregrines and Merlins	Year 6
Lower sixth	Year 7
Upper sixth	Year 8

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Pupils' achievements from their starting points are excellent.
- The pupils develop excellent communication skills as a result of frequent practice and the many opportunities for them to perform and present at school events.
- Pupils with initially low starting points make rapid progress because lessons are adapted to meet their needs, using effective advice and guidance from specialists at the school.
- The pupils develop excellent social skills and positive attitudes through a wide range of extra-curricular activities that provide opportunities for leadership and teamwork.

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

- The development of pupils' resilience, self-esteem, self-confidence and self-discipline is outstanding thanks to the supportive, patient and positive approach of the staff.
- Pupils are polite and courteous, and engage in respectful interactions with staff.
- Pupils have a strong social awareness of each other's individual differences and talents.
- Pupils develop a strong sense of right and wrong and take responsibility for their own behaviour.

Recommendations

2.3 In the context of excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:

- increasing opportunities for pupils to apply their information and communication technology (ICT) and digital learning skills in lessons across the curriculum;
- ensuring that, when marking pupils' written work, teachers' comments always identify ways in which pupils might improve their work.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Almost all pupils arrive with attainment levels lower than expected for their chronological age, and many have experienced low levels of confidence or difficulties with education prior to arrival. Pupils' achievements from their various starting points are excellent. In questionnaire responses, and during interviews with inspectors, all pupils said that they made excellent progress whilst at school. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of parents say that their children have opportunities to learn and make good progress.
- 3.3 From low starting points, pupils make rapid progress from Year 4 to Year 6 in developing their skills in literacy and numeracy because of well-planned, creative, cross-curricular topics and timely interventions that directly meet individual needs. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the way that vision therapy helps them track word patterns, counsellors assist them in developing their social and communication skills and occupational therapists help them develop their fine and gross motor skills. Analysis of school information shows that pupils make excellent progress during their years at Bruern Abbey School. For example, more than three-quarters of the pupils increase their reading age by more than one year, and in some cases up to three years, for each year they attend the school to make up for previously lost ground. This is one of the contributory factors that enable them to catch up and tackle with confidence the Common Entrance examination alongside other pupils. The school regularly achieves 100% pass rates in the Common Entrance examination.
- 3.4 Pupils make excellent progress because of effective partnerships between leaders, teachers, parents and therapists. Pupils' enjoyment and learning are enhanced by trips, locally and further afield. Pupils feel well supported and say that they develop their knowledge and understanding in ways in which they would not have done in the previous schools they attended. They have strong subject skills which they apply well through cross-curricular links in a range of activities. Pupils make rapid progress in lessons because of skilful and knowledgeable teachers who adapt lessons after receipt of advice and guidance from therapists and staff with specialist qualifications that take into account the specific needs and aptitudes of the pupils. Pupils say that they are confident to seek help when required because of the trusting relationships they have with staff. They also have access to a range of sensory resources and ancillary aids that support their learning.
- 3.5 Pupils' communication skills are excellent because teachers provide them with opportunities to apply these skills in and out of lessons. Pupils listen carefully and with respect to each other and articulate answers to questions in a coherent manner. They make outstanding use of communication skills through their participation in many different activities and events, such as when performing in *Oliver* or participating in public speaking and school assemblies. Pupils say that, before they arrived at the school, they would not have had the confidence to stand up and talk to an audience. The school has given them the public-speaking confidence and ability to make presentations to classmates, parents and visiting adults.
- 3.6 Junior school pupils complete high-quality pieces of extended writing because of opportunities provided in English, such as writing newspaper articles about how Roman soldiers built Hadrian's wall or producing poetry in the style of Edward Lear after a cross-curricular egg and art nonsense poetry topic. Senior school pupils show excellent creative writing skills, for example when they were inspired by the poetry of D H Lawrence and William Blake to write their own poetic imagery or use similes to recount a story. Pupils in Year 8 displayed excellent writing skills by using sentence structures that included subordinate clauses when producing a formal letter to their future head at a new school.

- 3.7 Pupils make rapid progress in mathematics because of knowledgeable and supportive teaching, which provides most effectively for pupils with different levels of ability. Junior school pupils apply excellent knowledge and understanding of mathematics when exploring symmetry by completing drawings of the left half of a butterfly body. They are confident to apply their logical and mathematical understanding to a range of activities, such as using a compass and orienteering knowledge to find the position of buildings across the school. Senior school pupils show outstanding application of complex mathematical knowledge and understanding in a variety of contexts. For example, they chose to explore costings to design a zoo which included the number and type of animals to be purchased, the size and cost of the fences required for each breed of animal, as well as costs to develop a car park, restaurant, benches, souvenir shop and a children's play area.
- 3.8 Many pupils are confident and competent in the use of word-processing packages, particularly for homework and during prep time. Pupils talk confidently about interesting topics and have made rapid progress in developing their research and development skills because assistive ICT software enables them to dictate their work or use a reading pen to produce word-processed written work. However, there are few directed opportunities in lessons for the effective use of digital technology and the use of ICT across the school is not coordinated effectively. As a result, pupils do not have the opportunity to apply personally developed ICT skills across a range of subjects.
- 3.9 Pupils' ability to discuss and frame evidence-based arguments is outstanding. This is because pupils enjoy putting their ideas forward in a supportive environment where they are not afraid of making mistakes. As a result, they make excellent use of evidence collected to analyse information and to draw conclusions. Pupils show excellent collaborative learning, such as when they worked together to design and make a boat in competitive pairs as part of a school challenge, and then sailed their designs down a local river. Senior pupils show excellent motivation and engagement in their learning, because of the increased expectations of these pupils in Years 7 and 8. These older pupils reported that the strategies they were learning were helping them significantly in their preparation for examinations.
- 3.10 More able pupils show significant progress in their writing capability, from initial low starting points to produce very high quality written work. From the outset, more able pupils are challenged to express their thinking and explanations through the use of supported writing guides which then enables them to embark on more difficult tasks to achieve at the levels of which they are capable.
- 3.11 In their response to the questionnaire, a few pupils stated that they did not know how well they are doing in subjects or that marking is not as helpful as it could be. Inspectors found that, in the great majority of lessons, pupils enjoyed and responded positively to teaching and that positive verbal feedback was a key feature, particularly for younger pupils or new arrivals. However, pupils' books show that marking of their work is not consistent across the school, particularly for older pupils. Some teachers' comments acknowledge achievement and effort rather than identifying the next step to further their learning.
- 3.12 Many pupils gain scholarships to senior schools for sport, such as rugby, or for academic achievement in subjects such as design, art and music. This is because their personal qualities are allowed to flourish through the school's extensive range of extra-curricular activities and clubs. Pupils' individual talents are developed in a mutually supportive community, because they are comfortable in each other's company and are accepting of their individual differences. Pupils who show a talent in sport receive support and encouragement to reach very high levels of performance. Some represent England at polo and junior skiing, attending many international events. Others play at district feeder level or county level in tennis, show jumping, rugby and junior clay pigeon shooting.

3.13 Throughout the school, pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. This is a considerable achievement given their starting points on arrival at the school. During interviews, a significant majority said they are keen to do well, regardless of the personal difficulties some of them experience. Pupils work well together and support each other. They are aware of the difficulties they face and the strategies they need to overcome them. Pupils are curious, willing to learn new skills and not afraid to take risks. They recognise that making mistakes is part of the learning process. Evidence of rapid progress, particularly in reading, is linked to the pupils' enthusiasm to learn. In response to the questionnaire, almost all parents said that the needs of their children are met effectively by the school, particularly those with children requiring support through occupational or speech and language therapy.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 The development of pupils' resilience, self-esteem, self-confidence and self-discipline is outstanding. This is because the school's ethos, steered by school leadership and the approach of the staff, is understanding, supportive, patient and positive. It is empowering and provides confidence. The pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, confident in their abilities and socially skilled and aware. They are accepting of themselves and each other. Pupils are extremely well motivated and fully engaged during their lessons. This is because teachers know the pupils extremely well.
- 4.3 Pupils feel increasingly confident in their own abilities as they move from Year 4 to Year 8. In the junior school, pupils welcome the opportunity to make guided decisions about the activities in which they can be involved. The increased feeling of empowerment has a positive impact on their learning and progress. Pupils become increasingly aware that their success is determined by their own approach to work and extra-curricular activities.
- 4.4 The pupils have an excellent appreciation of the world around them, recognising beauty in nature and the rich environment of the school grounds. Pupils develop a strong respect for each other and appreciate the individual personalities and differences amongst their classmates. They are happy to discuss their own areas of weakness and are non-judgemental about the strengths and weaknesses of others. Pupils' responsibility and care for each other can be seen in their careful attention to each other during games and sporting activities and in the way they show empathy for each other regardless of their expertise or talent.
- 4.5 Pupils show an excellent understanding of right and wrong and take responsibility for their own behaviour because the school takes time to explain the impact that school rules and procedures have on an orderly school community. They have a clear knowledge of the consequences of their own behaviour because of higher expectations for self-control and lighter supervision as they grow older. They also develop a strong awareness of the importance of fulfilling their responsibility towards others and strive hard to play their part in ensuring that their group or team achieves success. The extensive use of rewards, such as dormitory points for boarders and stars and diamonds for all pupils, motivate them to succeed.
- 4.6 Pupils possess an excellent awareness of moral issues and a mature insight into the recent UK election, because staff encourage balanced debate on current world events, such as the culling of sharks, Brexit and the presidential election earlier in the year in the USA. Pupils' moral understanding is successfully embedded through the school code of conduct and the themes for weekly chapel services. Care and consideration are shown to all members of the school community. The pupils mix easily across different age groups, because of the many opportunities they are offered through clubs, matches and performances.
- 4.7 The pupils' excellent development of social skills and awareness of others arise from the cohesive school community and the way this underpins their growth in confidence. They are polite and courteous, and engage in respectful interactions with adults. Pupils demonstrate considerable kindness and thoughtfulness towards their classmates during lessons, and they support each other willingly in the completion of work and practical tasks. Pupils' views are listened to by both pupils and staff as a result of thorough debate at both school and boarding councils.
- 4.8 The pupils show an outstanding sense of responsibility for themselves and for others. They aspire to gain positions on councils, as prefects and head boy, knowing they can help to organise and improve their own community. The pupils have an excellent understanding and appreciation of each other, the staff and other community members, of whom they speak with

great fondness. Boarders, in particular, enjoy caring for the school's chickens and dogs, and welcoming and attending to school guests, not least at the twice-weekly formal dinners. The older pupils have learnt, by example, to lead by example. Both boarders and day pupils are comfortable within themselves, and are excellent ambassadors for the school, of which they are proud.

- 4.9 The pupils have a very high level of understanding about the Christian ethos of the school and about the other faiths which they study. As a result, they talk confidently about democracy, respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Pupils of all ages gain excellent knowledge and understanding of European and North American countries as a result of a wide range of overseas trips. The junior school promotes pupils' awareness of the wider world through geographical map-work topics. Senior school pupils respect each other's different abilities, talents, nationalities and cultural traditions because staff create a sharing environment within the school. Talks in chapel, meeting parents, grandparents and school guests at formal dinners, and cultural trips all support this outcome. Pupils have an enriched knowledge of British values because of a secure understanding about their community of boarders and day pupils, including where they live or have travelled from.
- 4.10 The pupils' knowledge and application of how to stay healthy are excellent because of the school's educational approach to matters of health and well-being. Pupils are fully aware of the need to remain healthy and the impact of exercise on their bodies. They eat a healthy, well-balanced diet because of the encouragement provided by the principal and staff. The school environment and the trust that is engendered between the staff and the pupils give them a sense of freedom and contribute to their well-being. They appreciate the need and opportunity to relax and get a good night's sleep in order to support their own well-being. Pupils relish their involvement in sports and outdoor activities, and regard these as a natural part of a healthy lifestyle. They ride their bikes and play in the woods on the adventure playground and on the BMX track throughout the extensive school grounds.