



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

STOKE COLLEGE



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Stoke College			
DfE number	935/6003			
Registered charity number	310487			
Address	Stoke College Ashen Lane Stoke-by-Clare Sudbury Suffolk CO10 8JE			
Telephone number	01787 278141			
Email address	info@stokecollege.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Frank Thompson			
Chair of governors	Mr Jonathan Burchell			
Age range	4 to 16			
Number of pupils	113			
	Boys	63	Girls	50
	Day pupils	109	Boarders	4
	Prep	46	Seniors	67
Inspection dates	05 to 06 Oct 2016			

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 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 un-met 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.
- 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 grade descriptors 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 in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they 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 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 and deputy chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended an assembly. Inspectors visited the boarding house 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 Susan Marks	Reporting inspector
Mr Desmond Dunne	Accompanying inspector
Mrs Rebecca Glover	Team inspector (Head, Society of Heads school)
Mr David Williams	Team inspector (Compliance Officer, IAPS school)
Mrs Elizabeth Worthington	Team inspector for boarding (Senior Deputy Head, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Stoke College is an independent day and boarding school for boys and girls aged between 5 and 16 years, which was founded in 1951 and moved in 1954 to its current site set in 25 acres of parkland overlooking the river Stour. Its main building, which houses the boarders in a single community for boys and girls, once formed a monastic college dating from the 15th century. The school is a charitable trust, governed by a group of governors who are mainly from professional backgrounds and most of whom are parents of current or former pupils at the school. It is non-denominational and does not take academic ability into account in its admissions process. The ability profile of the pupils is in line with the national average. Pupils aged from 4 to 11 years attend the prep school and those aged between 11 and 16 years attend the senior school. The school offers weekly and flexible weekday boarding for girls and boys aged 9 and over.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection the senior leadership team has been restructured, and at the time of the inspection all its members had been in post for less than 2 years. The current headmaster was appointed in August 2015. The Nursery provision for pupils aged under 4 was closed in July 2016. There were no EYFS pupils at the time of the inspection. A pupils' kitchen and games room have been added to the boarding provision and the school now has a food technology room. In the prep school, Chinese and outdoor-based learning have been added to the curriculum. An enrichment programme has been introduced to the senior school curriculum and the whole school has moved to a fortnightly timetable in which most lessons are 50 minutes in length.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school's aim is to produce self-confident, successful and capable young people who have a broad mind, a respect for others, a desire to make a positive contribution in all aspects of life, and a clear appreciation of the value of happy schooldays. The school seeks to facilitate strong academic progress, provide a breadth of experiences and opportunities, and to be a caring community that allows confidence to grow, talents to blossom and weaknesses to be strengthened.

About the pupils

- 1.4 At the time of the inspection the school had 113 pupils; 63 boys and 50 girls. Of these, 4 board every night from Sunday to Thursday and a further number board less regularly. Boarding is flexible so that pupils may board, by arrangement, on any weeknight. No pupils currently board at weekends. Most are White British and come from a range of professional and farming backgrounds, and live within a 25-mile radius of the school. A total of 36 pupils are identified by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADD and ADHD; 12 pupils receive additional specialist support. Additionally, 3 pupils have an education, health and care plan and a further 3 have a statement of special educational needs. The school currently has no pupils for whom English is an additional language. It does not formally identify more able pupils.
- 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 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Continue to standardise assessment procedures and planning across the prep and senior schools to ensure smooth transition.
 - Develop the outdoor area in the EYFS for the youngest pupils to use independently.
- 1.7 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspection.
- 1.8 The recommendations of the intermediate boarding inspection in March 2014 were:
- Ensure that boarding roles and responsibilities are clear outside the house, and that at whole-school level there is clear educational and pastoral leadership for the oversight of boarding.
 - Ensure that all boarding staff are included regularly in the school's appraisal cycle.
- 1.9 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 enter the school with a wide range of abilities and they achieve well in relation to their starting points in many subjects. Pupils with SEND make very good progress as a result of the skilled support that they receive from the specialist unit.
- More able pupils attain levels appropriate for their ability in most subjects, but their progress in a few is restricted by insufficient challenge in lessons and lack of opportunities for independent learning.
- Pupils do not always know how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve, as the feedback they receive is sometimes insufficiently detailed or frequent.
- Pupils' achievement when working with resistant materials is restricted by a lack of opportunity to gain experience in using some required items of equipment and software.

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

- Pupils are friendly, courteous and respectful of each other and of staff. They grow in self-confidence as they move through the school.
- From their earliest years in the school, pupils develop an appreciation of non-material aspects of life through contact with music, art, drama and literature in their lessons and wider activities. Boarders feel happy, safe and well-supported by staff and each other.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Ensure a consistent whole-school approach to the planning of lessons and setting of homework, taking into account the individual abilities of all pupils and providing suitable opportunities for independent learning, including the use of ICT.
- Ensure that marking and assessment in all subjects provide pupils with frequent and detailed feedback, so that they know how well they are doing and how they can improve.
- Allocate sufficient resources to resistant materials to ensure that pupils can gain suitable experience of using the equipment and software required for them to achieve their full potential at GCSE.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 The school does not take part in National Curriculum tests but the available evidence in the prep school displays that attainment is similar to national age-related expectations. Results in 2014 and 2015 GCSE examinations have been similar to the national average for maintained schools; results in 2016 showed an improvement on previous years. These outcomes demonstrate that the school is successful in achieving its academic aims; it identifies and provides opportunities to nurture each child's capabilities and pupils are well-supported in their academic progress. In both the prep and senior schools, pupils enter with a broad range of ability and all achieve well in relation to their starting points. Boys and girls attain at similar levels in all years. Pupils with SEND make very good progress as a result of the specialist support they receive. They are secure in their knowledge and understanding as a result of the excellent specialist support provided by the learning development unit, which employs a variety of successful strategies to build on pupils' learning and tailors activities to suit individual aptitudes and needs.
- 3.3 Pupils of all ages and abilities demonstrate good knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum. For example, pupils in an English lesson demonstrated very good understanding by enthusiastically and accurately answering questions on texts from *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Pupils' literacy skills are strengthened where needed through one-to-one sessions which make effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and phonics to increase their knowledge about words. In mathematics, teachers use number games such as "Shut The Box" to enable pupils to practise their multiplication skills.
- 3.4 In the prep school, pupils enjoy exploring, investigating and problem solving. Teaching makes frequent use of letters and sounds activities which help to foster pupils' speaking, learning, reading and writing skills. Pupils develop their numeracy skills through active and engaging lessons in which individual needs are planned for and delivered in an effective way. For example, pupils in a Year 1 mathematics lesson joined their teacher on a chair "bus" and disembarked at different destinations, so developing their subtraction skills.
- 3.5 Senior school pupils are knowledgeable and have well-developed skills for learning. They discuss issues in lessons with sensitivity and awareness of the needs of others; their written work is mature and reflective. Pupils' mathematical skills are good and they are adept at problem solving. Their attitudes to learning are very positive at all ages and they are active participants in most lessons, with an ability to plan and organise their own work. Pupils' progress in a minority of lessons observed was limited by a slow pace and/or a lack of consideration for their individual needs and abilities in lesson planning. In many subjects, pupils can explain how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, but in a minority of subjects they do not receive the level of detailed frequent feedback necessary for them to be able to do this. Pupils' learning is supported in general by an adequate level of resources, but access to ICT facilities is limited and the attainment of older pupils in resistant materials work is restricted by a lack of access to the equipment and software required by the GCSE specification.

- 3.7 Some pupils develop very good independent learning skills, as demonstrated in a Year 10 history lesson where pupils were asked to speak from the viewpoint of Adolf Hitler, having conducted their own research. Independent learning skills in some subjects are held back by the lack of opportunities for individual research or self-direction. For example, pupils are not actively encouraged to use the school's computer information systems due to pressure on the current limited facilities, or the library which was closed for health and safety reasons at the time of the inspection. The school's senior leadership team identified the need for improvement prior to the inspection and provision has been made for focused staff training designed to ensure greater consistency of practice across departments in the quality of lesson planning, the targeting of teaching, marking and assessment to pupils' needs, and creating opportunities for independent learning. Pupils' progress has been systematically tracked since September 2016 by two newly appointed key leaders responsible for academic oversight in each of the prep and senior schools. The impact of this initiative on individual pupils' progress will become clear through the introduction of half-termly reports, the first of which was sent to parents in the week of the inspection.
- 3.8 Pupils study a suitable range of subjects at all stages; the curriculum is broad and balanced. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, parents were unanimous that the curriculum meets the needs of their children and that it affords them the opportunity to develop skills for the future. Many Year 11 leavers gain places at the institution of their choice for the next stage of their education, or take up apprenticeships or other employment. A minority of parents and pupils in their pre-inspection questionnaire responses indicated dissatisfaction with the guidance provided regarding subject and career choices. Through scrutiny of documentation and in interviews with pupils and staff, the inspection found that the school provides substantial guidance on subject choices. Pupils have not received the opportunity to gain work experience organised through the school but a new careers and enrichment programme, which was introduced to the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 in September 2016, includes plans for trips to local employers and visiting speakers who represent a wide range of careers.
- 3.9 Pupils achieve well across all areas of school life. They compete successfully in a variety of team sports including netball, hockey, football and rugby as well as representing the school at ISA regional and national events. Teamwork skills are also developed through pupils of all ages working together to raise money for charities chosen by the pupils. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme was introduced in September 2016 and pupils in Years 9 and 10 have begun to work towards the bronze level; pupils particularly appreciate the opportunities it offers them to undertake voluntary work in the local community and to participate in outdoor activities and expeditions.
- 3.10 The school has met the recommendations of the previous full inspection to standardise assessment procedures and planning across the prep and senior schools to ensure smooth transition. The requirement that the school develop the outdoor area in the EYFS for the youngest pupils to use independently was met. The school does not currently have any EYFS pupils. Outdoor learning has now been introduced into the work of the prep school.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils are courteous and very well-behaved. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, almost all pupils stated that the school encourages them to respect other people, and interactions between the pupils and with the staff reflect this. This mutual consideration is evident in the manner in which pupils wait for their lessons to begin, co-operate with each other around the school and queue for their meals. They talk, and socialise easily with each other and adults. Pupils say that they are encouraged to improve their social skills by the school policy which does not permit the use of mobile telephones during the school day. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are friendly, supportive and appropriate. Pupils' individual talents thrive and areas of relative weakness are improved as a result of the school's ethos of caring and respect. Their self-confidence develops as they move through the school, transferring seamlessly from the prep to senior school. Pupils display excellent self-awareness in both lessons and activities, facilitated by encouraging yet realistic feedback from staff. For example one pupil made a speech to her peers from an upturned waste bin; she explained that this is something she would never have had the courage to do before joining the school. Pupils are seen to grow as individuals both academically and socially, confident that the school is a safe environment in which kindness and compassion are qualities expected of everyone. The school is careful to provide the time and opportunity for this, as observed in a lesson where a Year 3 pupil was praised for setting aside his own work to help a nearby Year 2 pupil who was struggling with the task set.
- 4.3 Pupils are tolerant and understanding of the differences between their abilities, backgrounds and interests, which reflects success in achieving one of the key aims of the school. They enthusiastically promote understanding of their own and other cultures; for example those in the prep school are looking forward to the possibility that Chinese students may join the school and be available to help them in their study of Mandarin. Boarders are keen to see an expansion of the range of countries represented on their national "diversity board". Pupils recognise that others have differing characteristics and capabilities; they understand and support the particular requirements of those with SEND and they appreciate and celebrate the successes and contributions of all, including those who achieve at particularly high levels in academic work, sport, music, art or other activities. Prep school pupils are encouraged to try their hardest by a system of head's commendations and house points, which are keenly sought after.

- 4.4 Older pupils set a shining example in their friendly and inclusive approach to other pupils and adults, and they are warmly supportive of those who find school life more challenging. Prefects in the prep school are very positive, confident and self-assured, and they work hard to try to resolve issues before consulting staff. Older boarders are excellent at supporting those who are new to boarding or trying flexi-boarding for the first time, explaining routines sensibly and making all feel welcome. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses a minority of senior school pupils disagreed that the school deals effectively with bullying if it occurs, and also disagreed that staff treat pupils fairly. In interviews with pupils and staff, and through reviewing records of sanctions and rewards and other documentation, the inspection found that the school deals with the rare incidence of bullying effectively and in line with its published procedures, and that all pupils are dealt with fairly. In the prep school, pupils say that bullying seldom occurs and that it is very quickly dealt with by staff. Boarders state that bullying does not take place in the boarding house. Nearly all pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire stated that they feel safe at school and that they understand how to stay safe online. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that their children are properly supervised both in school and on educational trips and visits.
- 4.5 Pupils of all ages display a secure sense of knowing what is right and wrong; they have a strong sense of fair play and enthusiastically promote the rules of the school. They are aware of the main laws of the country, and they demonstrate a sound grasp of the democratic process through which they elect their year group representatives to the school council, which is led by the head girl and head boy. Younger and older pupils exercise careful responsibility for others appropriate to their ages through roles as prefects in the prep school and senior school.
- 4.6 Pupils understand how to be physically and mentally healthy, and can explain the importance of eating well, taking exercise and having a balanced lifestyle. They develop excellent resilience but know when to seek help and will readily ask for advice or support from staff if it is needed. Parents' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the way the school meets their children's pastoral and welfare needs. For some pupils, boarding is an opportunity to start to prepare for life beyond school; they grow in self-confidence and independence, and they appreciate the friendships they develop across the age range. Boarders say that they feel safe and supported; this is encouraged by the effective leadership of the boarding staff who regularly review the provision.
- 4.7 From their earliest years in the school, pupils develop an appreciation of non-material aspects of life through their contact with music, art, drama and literature in their lessons and wider activities and trips, the range of which has expanded since the last inspection. Pupils in both the prep and senior schools understand the circumstances of those less fortunate than themselves and are active in supporting them; they raise awareness as well as funds for charities selected through the school council such as the British Heart Foundation. Pupils enjoy opportunities to raise funds or donate gifts through termly non-uniform days, numerous cake sales and regular set pieces such as the Royal British Legion poppy appeal, harvest festival and Christmas bazaar.
- 4.8 The recommendation in the previous boarding inspection that boarding roles and responsibilities are clear outside the house, and that at whole school level there is clear educational and pastoral leadership for the oversight of boarding has been met. The recommendation that all boarding staff are included regularly in the school's appraisal cycle has also been met.