



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

BERKHAMSTED SCHOOL

INTERIM INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Berkhamsted School

The preparatory school was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of School	Berkhamsted School		
DCSF Number	919/6005		
Registered Charity Number	311056		
Address	Berkhamsted School 131-133 High St Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 2DJ		
Telephone Number	01442 358002		
Fax Number	01442 358003		
Email Address	principal@berkhamstedschool.org		
Principal	Mr Mark Steed		
Chair of Governors	Mr Peter Williamson		
Age Range	11 to 19		
Total Number of Pupils	1064		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	5-11:	
	3-5 (EYFS):	11-18:	1064
Number of Day Pupils	1017	Capacity for flexi-boarding:	Yes
Number of Boarders	Total:	47	
	Full:	42	Weekly: 5
Inspection Dates	10th – 11th November 2009		

PREFACE

The report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule for INTERIM* inspections. The inspection is a two day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in January 2006.

ISI is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
- (b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
- (c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) The premises and accommodation
- (g) The provision of information
- (h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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

A specific inspection of boarding was not carried out and the report does not contain judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. Any comments on boarding arising from this inspection are in the context of the school as a whole. The existing report on boarding was produced by the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

CONTENTS

Page

1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

2 THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

3 ACTION POINTS

(a) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(b) Recommended action

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Berkhamsted School caters for boys and girls aged 3 to 19, with a boarding option for those aged 11 to 19. The school is divided into four sections: the preparatory school, for pupils aged 3 to 11; separate boys' and girls' senior schools for pupils aged 11 to 16; and a co-educational sixth form. This report is concerned with the senior schools and sixth form, each of which has a head of school under the overall direction of the principal. The school has a single governing body.
- 1.2 The senior schools have a total of 1064 pupils, of whom 47 are boarders and 1017 day pupils. Of these, 620 are boys and 444 are girls; 325 pupils are in the sixth form. The number of pupils is roughly the same as at the time of the last inspection.
- 1.3 Berkhamsted School was established in 1541 and the girls' school was added to the foundation in 1888. The schools were amalgamated in 1996, together with the respective prep and junior sections, initially as Berkhamsted Collegiate School and, from 2009, as Berkhamsted School. The school aims to provide both single-sex and co-education across a broad and balanced curriculum. It seeks to ensure teaching by well-qualified and experienced teachers. It intends pupils to achieve outstanding academic excellence, and strives for supportive discipline and pastoral care. Although boys and girls between 11 and 16 are taught separately, they join in a variety of extra-curricular activities. In total, 151 pupils receive financial support from the school.
- 1.4 Pupils are drawn mainly from the surrounding area, with almost all from white European backgrounds. Boarders come largely from overseas, mainly from the Far East. The pupils' average ability is above the national average. The school has identified 329 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), of whom 163 receive support. A total of 41 pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), of whom 25 receive support.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills

- 2.1 Throughout the school, pupils progress well. They are articulate and confident, expressing themselves fluently both orally and in writing. They present complex ideas, ask perceptive questions and use mathematics confidently. They apply previous learning in new situations. They achieve well, obtaining GCSE results which are high compared with the national average for all maintained schools; the proportion of A*/A grades is three times the national average and comparable with the proportion in maintained selective schools. At A level, results are high compared with maintained selective schools, with a significantly higher proportion of A/B grades. Pupils show application, perseverance and enjoyment; they participate well in discussion and enjoy opportunities to work independently and collaboratively. They are almost always well focused. Pupils achieve widespread success in many activities, ranging from drama and swing band to sport and academic competitions, in all of which standards are high. Almost all pupils gain entry to their first choice of university.
- 2.2 Pupils' success is underpinned by the hard work and commitment of staff, and by good teaching. Pupils with LDD or EAL are well supported. Almost all lessons are well structured, use a wide variety of tasks, are challenging and have a brisk pace, maintaining pupils' interest and focus, and supporting their good progress. Teachers use paired and group work well. Occasionally the rapid pace makes it hard for pupils to pursue difficulties. Activities are well organised, with similarly high expectations. Most marking provides helpful guidance, as does oral feedback in class. The school is making appropriate use of assessment data to track pupils' progress. Pupils much appreciate the flexibility of choice at GCSE and A level; however, the school does not use the time for modern foreign languages well or make full use of pupils' skills in information and communication technology in their wider learning. A varied programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught up to Year 11; lectures and related discussion in tutor groups enhance sixth-form education. The careers programme includes interesting opportunities to have lunch with adults from a wide variety of professional backgrounds. Both pupils and their parents value the exceptional range of extra-curricular activities.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 2.3 The pupils' excellent personal development helps create a warm and caring community where they feel secure and show a mature and responsible attitude to learning. Almost all parents are positive about pupils' attitudes, values and behaviour. Pupils use chapel and assemblies for reflection. They have exceptionally good standards of behaviour, understand right and wrong, and reflect on moral decisions. Staff and older pupils are good role models. Pupils respond well to the many opportunities to take responsibility. They show excellent social awareness, are conscious of others and their needs, and respect each other's opinions. Although a significant number of pupils feel they are not listened to, others value the school council and feel their suggestions are acted on. Some Year 12 pupils would value greater involvement with younger pupils.

- 2.4 The excellent pastoral care is valued by parents. The well-developed and successful house system is much appreciated by pupils, who say their head of house is the first person they would talk to if they need advice. Heads of house know their pupils well and build up valuable knowledge of their families. A recent Ofsted boarding inspection found that all aspects of boarding were good. Communication with tutors and heads of school is good. Pupils say that bullying is not an issue. The PSHE programme encourages healthy living and eating. Lunches are excellent, with a wide choice of good quality food. Appropriate policies for child protection are supported by thorough training. The medical centre is well equipped and staffed. Good consideration is given to health and safety. Risk assessments are thorough and fire safety well managed. Registration is satisfactory but the school has only just started backing up the admissions register, as is required.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

- 2.5 Governors give strong support in many areas. In the main, they oversee aspects of welfare, health and safety well, though they have given insufficient attention to the recording of checks on staff. The structure of committees, attended by senior staff and common room representatives, ensures governors work closely with a variety of staff and have a good sense of the school's needs. They bring a wide range of experience and expertise, with education well represented at senior level. They have a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result of their careful investment, the school has an excellent range of facilities.
- 2.6 School leadership has clear overall direction and strong vision, but shows some lack of attention to detail. The delegation of greater responsibility, autonomy and accountability has been warmly received by staff, who have a clear view of their place in school structures. Monitoring of teaching and learning works well. The school development plan is at an early stage but sets out key objectives over the next few years. Most checks on staff have been completed correctly, though there are a few omissions, and recording this information on a central register has only just begun. New staff appreciate the induction and support they receive and the opportunities for professional development. Premises are well used and support education well.
- 2.7 The school maintains effective links with parents, who are kept well informed. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, parents were overwhelmingly positive about the school, though a minority thought that there could be more opportunities to be involved. Inspectors found that parents can attend many school events, that the principal holds a variety of meetings to raise issues with parents and that, where concerns arise, meetings are readily arranged. The school has suitable procedures for handling complaints.

3. ACTION POINTS

(a) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 3.1 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended, with the exception of those indicated below.

Under Standard 3 (Welfare, health and safety) it must:

- back up the admissions register monthly and keep the back-ups for the required time [Regulation 3.(9)];
- ensure that the required procedures for appointing staff are followed in full [Regulation 3.(2)(b)].

Under Standard 4 (The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors) it must:

- ensure that all required checks are carried out on staff and volunteers on appointment [Regulation 4.(2)(a)];
- complete the compilation of the centralised register of appointments [Regulation 4C.(1)].

(b) Recommended action

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

1. extend the use of information and communication technology further to support pupils' learning;
2. review curricular arrangements for modern foreign languages.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors and other governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Ian Newton

Reporting Inspector

Mrs Maureen Bradley

Assistant Reporting Inspector (Former Head,
GSA school)

Mr Martin Lloyd

Director (ISA/IAPS school)