



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report
For Schools with Residential Provision**

Bethany School

April 2023

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School's Details

School	Bethany School			
DfE number	886/6036			
Registered charity number	307937			
Address	Bethany School Goudhurst Cranbrook Kent TN17 1LB			
Telephone number	01580 211273			
Email address	hmsec@bethanyschool.org.uk			
Headteacher	Mr Francie Healy			
Chair of governors	Mr Jonathan Fenn			
Proprietor	Bethany School, Limited			
Age range	11 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	351			
	Day pupils	285	Boarders	66
	Seniors	278	Sixth Form	73
Inspection dates	18 to 20 April 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Bethany School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school. Founded in 1864, it is now based on a site of 60 acres in the Weald of Kent, close to the village of Goudhurst. The school is a charitable trust, overseen by a board of governors. Boarders are accommodated in two boarding houses on site.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has extended its outdoor learning facilities.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school seeks to provide each pupil with a tailored education which includes appropriate independent learning opportunities within a caring community. It aims to maximise pupils' abilities as well as their understanding of themselves, so that they can achieve their objectives and leave school well prepared for the next stage of their lives in the modern world.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from professional families; day pupils live within a 20-mile radius of the school, boarders from further afield in England and from 14 countries overseas. Standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the overall ability of the pupils in the senior school is average and in the sixth form is below average compared with those taking the same tests nationally. There are 237 pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autistic spectrum condition, of whom 149 require extra support. There are 42 pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), of whom 24 receive specific help. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school identifies 45 more able and talented pupils and they receive extension activities and enrichment beyond the curriculum.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, including the National Minimum Standards for Boarding ('boarding NMS'), where applicable. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards, including the boarding NMS. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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.

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 published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022 and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 At GCSE in the years 2020 to 2022, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 Pupils take A-level examinations in their final year at the school. The small numbers involved prevent reliable comparison with national averages, but inspection evidence confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place. Boarders have access to a suitable programme of activities.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Boarders are supported to develop good relationships with fellow pupils and staff which are based on mutual trust and respect. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 13, 17 and 21 are met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed.
- 2.11 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996, and NMS 3, 5–12, 15, 16 and 20 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.12 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.
- 2.13 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 19 and 22 are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.14 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.15 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 4, 7 and 23 are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.16 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.
- 2.17 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are met.**

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.18 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.
- 2.19 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 14 are met.**

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.20 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.
- 2.21 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] and NMS 2 are met.**

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports 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.

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

Key findings

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

- Pupils achieve good and sometimes excellent results in external examinations, often exceeding their grade related expectations.
- Pupils with SEND and EAL make excellent progress from their starting points.
- Pupils are highly proficient in their use of information and communication technology (ICT) and apply it effectively across all subjects.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to their learning, work with determination towards long-term goals and demonstrate resilience to overcome any challenges they face.
- Pupils develop a wide range of interests and skills through participation in the highly effective enrichment programme.

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

- Pupils' self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth increase rapidly as they move through the school.
- Pupils are excellent decision-makers who value the advice given to help them work out the best route to their young adult lives.
- Pupils take on responsibilities willingly and with enthusiasm, to the benefit of the whole community.
- Pupils celebrate diversity within the school community and value their differences as well as their shared humanity.
- Through the outreach programme, pupils make valuable contributions beyond school and gain a sense of empathy with others

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

- Enable pupils to make more meaningful contributions to school decision-making by increasing the ways in which they can contribute ideas and receive feedback about them.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils achieve good and sometimes excellent results at GCSE, A Level and in BTech and other vocational courses taken in the sixth form. The small number of pupils who choose to sit an extended project qualification (EPQ) achieve success in these. Results at both GCSE and A level over the last three years show that attainment was consistently above the national average in 2020 and 2021, the years of centre- and teacher-assessed grades, and that this trend has continued in 2022. The school's value-added data show that almost all pupils achieve above their expected levels and, in the case of many SEND and EAL pupils, well above them. A strong contributory factor to these successes is the commitment of senior leaders and governors to tailoring their education to each pupil's strengths and providing a curriculum which is flexible year on year and allows a free choice of subjects. In their pre-inspection questionnaires almost all parents agreed that their child's individual educational needs are met effectively.
- 3.6 Pupils, who arrive with a wide range of learning skills, show a strong acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school. They state that the school's emphasis on teaching transferable skills from the outset helps them to improve their learning across the curriculum. Year 9 pupils in English developed their vocabulary by identifying language used to describe Ozymandias in Shelley's poem and used sophisticated terminology to analyse the use of language in poetry. They develop physical skills highly effectively in response to challenging and well targeted coaching in physical education; practical and creative skills in a wide range of subjects, including design and technology (DT), art, textiles, music and drama; and learning skills to aid understanding and revision for examinations within the learning support department and different subject areas. These acquired skills enable pupils to have a strong sense of how they learn best so that they improve their understanding and acquire knowledge highly effectively. In history, Year 9 pupils confidently interpreted propaganda cartoons of the time to analyse the significance of the treaty of Versailles on German society. Sixth-form pupils demonstrated an assured approach to learning new concepts when being introduced to externalities in economics. In work seen from Year 7, pupils showed strong acquisition of knowledge and understanding of countries and cultures of the world in geography and of issues of sustainability in their project-based learning.
- 3.7 Pupils, including those with SEND and EAL, display excellent communication skills, making the most of all opportunities provided for them by committed staff across the school and in boarding. Here many pupils benefit from close relationships built with highly supportive staff who, boarders say, have their best interests at heart. Those who arrive with limited English make progress quickly so that any barriers to their learning are short-lived. Pupils speak with confidence in lessons and in many other contexts such as when giving a scholars talk, a project-based learning presentation or in school assemblies. Those studying modern foreign languages for GCSE can use tenses appropriately in oral and written work. They are attentive and respectful listeners who are aware of the need to allow others, who may be less articulate, to answer questions or express a view. Pupils of all abilities write with confidence and take careful account of feedback given to help them improve their style further. Creative writing work by Year 7 pupils on topics such as school life in 2123, or that of sixth-form pupils on plate tectonics show that many pupils can write well beyond levels expected at their age.
- 3.8 Pupils' numeracy skills in relation to their starting points are strong. Many spoke to inspectors of their love of mathematics and were able to demonstrate how their progress had been rapid because of the confidence instilled in them by teachers. Pupils with noticeable mathematical ability engage enthusiastically with problem-solving and willingly take GCSE early, continuing to do additional mathematics before entering the sixth form. All pupils apply their numeracy skills in other subjects and in cross-curricular work, such as when designing an eco-farm where they used numeracy skills to work out costs and revenues. Pupils are willing contributors to others' understanding. They are able mathematicians and help teach those who are less mathematically assured in a range of subjects, such as economics in the sixth form.

- 3.9 Pupils are extremely comfortable in the digital world and make appropriate use of ICT for presenting their work and supporting their learning in all their subjects. They use effective software in music to enhance their composition skills; in DT to produce their design portfolios; in art and photography to transform and develop images; in geography and the sciences to visually represent and interpret data. They value working on their own laptops and are adept at producing and storing work on these devices, speaking enthusiastically about how it has made accessing lesson information straightforward, aided receiving rapid feedback from teachers and improved their organisational skills. SEND and EAL pupils access an immersive reading programme online which has greatly aided their reading skills and led to improved value added in their examinations. Pupils value a mix of approaches in different subjects so that they also maintain their inter-personal skills of collaborative working and producing written work in books. The most digitally able and enthusiastic pupils have achieved notable success beyond school, year on year, in the UK Beaver Computing Challenge, winning gold awards.
- 3.10 Pupils develop a wide range of study skills as they move through the school and are encouraged by staff to recognise their own successful ways of working. All pupils benefit from techniques developed within learning support such as *revise, record, review*. When given opportunities to work independently and collaboratively, as in the project-based learning in Years 7 to 9, pupils embrace them with enthusiasm. This year they produced well-researched and thought-provoking responses to a brief to save water, electricity or reduce carbon emissions, such as an automatic rubbish sorter and a solar powered electric transformer. Older pupils can hypothesise, synthesise and evaluate a range of arguments when writing essays in the humanities, often demonstrating a nuanced understanding of complex issues. In creative subjects, pupils are able to pursue an idea to its conclusion and work independently, often with great success. Year 9 pupils, on their own initiative, designed fashion garments from recycled materials and achieved success in the Junk Kouture competition for sustainable and recyclable fashion.
- 3.11 Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They concentrate effectively in lessons and are well-focused on tasks set. They are aspirational and ready to seek help in order to maximise their potential, a character trait which increases noticeably as they move up the school and benefit from the school's *Virtue of Learning* approach. This emphasizes transferable skills and assists each individual to understand the way in which they learn most effectively. They say that the support received from staff, both during the school day and in the boarding environment, transforms their personal as well as their academic improvement as the school recognises the two are inextricably linked.
- 3.12 Pupils achieve success in many individual and group activities and are very appreciative of the school's enrichment programme which is effectively planned and supported by senior leaders and governors. A very wide range of activities is available and pupils make the most of them, developing physical skills on the high ropes or climbing wall. They find new interests to pursue and take part enthusiastically in activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) and a wide variety of sports, including dance. A large number of scholars over a wide range of disciplines, including academic, dance, music, drama, swimming and sports, are well supported with specialist coaching and a range of challenging activities and events. There have been team and individual successes at county level and beyond in cricket, netball, football, hockey and rugby. In the creative arts, large numbers of pupils take part in the annual musical production, both on stage and backstage; they achieve success in LAMDA examinations and those for musical performance and gain great success in the John Downton Awards for art including having work exhibited in the Turner Contemporary exhibition. These successes reflect how the school encourages each pupil to be 'the best they can be' though the school is equally supportive of the small daily steps to success demonstrated by its pupils.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils develop excellent self-knowledge, self-esteem and resilience rapidly, sometimes in the face of considerable personal challenges due to their specific learning needs and previous educational experiences. They build supportive relationships with each other, collaborating productively in lessons and working purposefully together towards shared aims when involved in clubs and the enrichment programme. Strong relationships are formed within and across year groups and in boarding houses, where pupils often work together and peer assess each other's work in a supportive way. In discussions, pupils across the school were able to articulate with clarity how their personal development has been shaped by the ethos of the school to support each individual. They feel valued and appreciate staff who help them develop their interests and abilities to promote a sense of self-worth. Pupils feel that they can be successful if they try hard and develop strategies to maximise their potential in the long term.
- 3.15 Pupils are very well aware of how small decisions, made on a daily basis, affect their short and long-term future success. On-going decisions, such as when to get work done in the boarding house or which enrichment activities to pursue, are made with confidence. Then, when larger decisions need to be made about subject choices or future pathways, pupils are able to consider them carefully and act on advice given to them. Pupils value the *Project Horizon Programme* which helps them to make appropriate decisions such as whether to take up an apprenticeship or apply for university. They think carefully about which activities, option choices and academic pathways will challenge them appropriately and understand the need to strike a healthy balance between their studies and extra-curricular activities. In all of these choices pupils are well supported by staff who know them well and invest their time and energy to guide them. In this environment of mutual support pupils are keen to take up positions of responsibility, deciding to apply to be school leaders or members of one of the school council committees.
- 3.16 Pupils have a strong sense of the importance of right behaviour. They consider the views of others and take responsibility for their own behaviour, accepting that rules are necessary for a community to be effective. In their pre-inspection questionnaires, a minority of pupils did not agree that they were always treated fairly, suggesting that there is some variation in the application of sanctions by staff. Inspection evidence partially supported this view in the case of low-level sanctions but found that serious misdemeanours are responded to appropriately and carefully recorded. Pupils say that they want to be the best versions of themselves and understand the necessity to do the right thing. They say that they would not tolerate bullying and would intervene if necessary. The congeniality with which they mix, including in boarding houses and across age groups, is a strong feature of the school. They have a strong sense of justice and of morality in its broadest sense, as exemplified in a Year 8 English lesson where pupils discussed the moral dimensions of themes in *Oliver Twist*.
- 3.17 Pupils gain an understanding of their spirituality and non-material aspects of life in a variety of ways, within and beyond the curriculum. Those who study art, DT, photography and textiles pursue a creative idea to its conclusion in a range of different ways, providing them and those who see their sculptures, paintings, or textiles with a real sense of the value of creativity. Pupils describe a great sense of joy when taking part in a school production, a musical concert or when devising their own recipes and cooking them. Moments of quietness in the chapel or just looking at the setting sun across the nearby fields provide tranquillity in the midst of busy lives. The concentration of navigating the high ropes, or engaging wholeheartedly in a dance routine choreographed by themselves, enable pupils to be fully involved in the moment. They value friendships and happiness more than material possessions and feel that the school's ethos helps them to do so. Pupils are actively engaged in ways to make the school more sustainable and appreciate the varied environments of the school grounds, making the most of the spaces available to them.

- 3.18 Pupils collaborate highly effectively in activities within and beyond the curriculum. In the extensive and innovative enrichment programme pupils work successfully in teams such as when taking part in the DofE, archery, the school musical production, or learning survival skills in the school's woodland. Teams of three pupils use the climbing wall and work effectively to complete their challenge; in history pupils collaborate effectively to assist each other in revising for their examinations. Older and younger scholars in a range of disciplines such as DT, music and sport support each other in developing their skills and pupil leaders work as a team to monitor younger pupils' behaviour. Boarders describe their houses as comfortable communities where pupils of different nationalities mix easily and show kindness and understanding. Pupils develop their social skills by taking part in the school council and committees within boarding houses. In their pre-inspection questionnaires, a small minority of pupils did not agree that their views are listened to. The school accepts that more explanations are needed when pupils' ideas are not taken up and that there could be more opportunities for pupils to be involved in helping to effect change.
- 3.19 Pupils contribute willingly and effectively to the school community, the local community and, in their charity endeavours, to the wider world. Opportunities to take on responsibility are willingly taken up across the school and older pupils are excellent ambassadors, serving as role models for younger pupils to aspire to. Pupils seek solutions to some of the most pressing problems of our time created by waste and the misuse of resources. They support each other in raising large sums of money for a variety of charitable causes, which have included animal welfare charities, those to do with rape prevention and people displaced by war. Through the outreach programme pupils enthusiastically support a variety of local institutions, such as primary schools and care homes, by giving of their time to help with reading and playing games.
- 3.20 Pupils show high levels of sensitivity, understanding and tolerance towards each other, regardless of background or ability. They respect and celebrate diversity and different cultures and say that learning about different ways of looking at the world in history, religious studies, music and English lessons, for instance, helps them to broaden their understanding of what it is to be human. In music pupils learned about slavery and the Windrush generation whilst studying the reggae music of Bob Marley. All pupils are accepted whatever their ethnicity, sexuality or gender identity. They are especially aware of the challenges some of their peers face with regard to maximising their learning potential and say that the school enables them to achieve beyond their expectations. Boarders say they enjoy learning about the lives of those from different cultures and faiths. The school's ethos of kindness to others permeates all aspects of school life.
- 3.21 Pupils have a strong sense of how to stay safe and they recognise the importance of good physical and mental health. In interviews they expressed high praise for the school's wellness centre and its staff who provide strategies to reduce stress and anxiety for pupils, especially in the run up to examinations. Pupils feel well supported for their mental health and they value mentoring from older pupils who help them to work out coping strategies. Governors and senior leaders have been highly successful in ensuring effective pastoral support for pupils who view seeking advice as natural rather than unusual. In their pre-inspection questionnaires, almost all parents agreed that the school is governed, led and managed effectively. Pupils engage successfully in their games' sessions and in a wide variety of other physical activities, including working out their own fitness programmes and following them in the school's fitness centre. In food and nutrition lessons they create healthy recipes and cook them, learning about the importance of good nutrition. School meals provide a balanced and nutritious diet. Pupils say they are well educated about the importance of keeping safe in the digital environment and they accept the systems in place to regulate their use of mobile devices.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended chapel and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Kate McCarey	Reporting inspector
Ms Kirsten McLintock	Compliance team inspector (Senior teacher, HMC school)
Mr Garry Binks	Team inspector for boarding (Former housemaster, HMC school)
Mr Mark Hoskins	Team inspector (Headmaster, HMC school)