



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

DOWNE HOUSE SCHOOL

**BOARDING WELFARE
INTERMEDIATE INSPECTION**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Downe House School

Full Name of School	Downe House School
DfE Number	869/6002
Registered Charity Number	1015059
Address	Downe House School Cold Ash Thatcham Berkshire RG18 9JJ
Telephone Number	01635 200286
Fax Number	01635 202026
Email Address	correspondence@downehouse.net
Headmistress	Mrs Emma McKendrick
Chair of Governors	Mr Richard Parry
Age Range	11 to 18
Total Number of Pupils	580
Gender of Pupils	Girls
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 23
Number of Boarders	Total: 557 Full: 557
Inspection dates	05 Feb 2013 to 07 Feb 2013

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule* for intermediate inspections, focusing primarily on compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (NMS). The inspection occurs over a period of two and a half continuous days in the school.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010. From September 2011 the inspection of boarding welfare forms part of the inspection process. This inspection focuses on the school's compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection. Boarding inspections were previously carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills. The relevant Ofsted report refers to an inspection in February 2009 and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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 their judgement.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors conducted formal interviews with boarders, held discussions with senior members of staff and with a governor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended registration sessions. Inspectors visited each of the boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and boarding pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Deborah Forbes	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Jean Gray	Team Inspector for Boarding (Former Senior Teacher, HMC school)
Ms Maggie Guy	Team Inspector for Boarding (Deputy Head, The Society of Heads school)
Miss Margaret Pepper	Team Inspector for Boarding (Former Head, ISA school)

CONTENTS

	Page
1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL	1
2 SUMMARY	2
(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements	2
(ii) Recommendation for further improvement	2
(iii) Progress since the previous inspection	2
3 COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS	3
(a) Boarding provision and care	3
(b) Arrangements for welfare and safeguarding	4
(c) Leadership and management of the boarding provision	4

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Downe House is a girls' independent full boarding school, for pupils aged from eleven to eighteen years, which aims to provide an excellent holistic education for its pupils within a relaxed but structured boarding house framework. It seeks to enable girls to develop academically, socially, spiritually and emotionally in a homely and friendly environment, where mutual trust and respect between pupils and staff are the fundamental guiding principles on which the community was established. The school is run by a board of trustees, known as the board of governors.
- 1.2 The school was founded in 1907 in Charles Darwin's home in Kent and moved to its current site in Cold Ash in 1921. Since that time the school has acquired a property in France where it provides each pupil in Year 8 with the opportunity to spend a term. Downe House has twelve boarding houses. One, called Hermitage, is in the nearby village of Hermitage and is for pupils in Year 7. All other houses are on site, and comprise two more lower school houses, five houses for pupils from Years 9 to 11 and four sixth form houses. Since the previous inspection the final phase of the Willis boarding house refurbishment has been carried out. An extension has been added to the school dining hall.
- 1.3 There are 580 pupils currently in the school, nearly all of whom are boarders. The school has a three-tiered structure, which enables it to tailor boarding and pastoral care to the needs of the different age groups whilst allowing them to mix across the age groups. Since the previous inspection, the school has extended its individual tutoring system throughout the whole school. Forty-six pupils have English as an additional language (EAL) and 13 of them receive support from the school for their English. The school has identified 65 pupils as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), five of whom receive specialist learning support. The majority of pupils are drawn from business and professional families in the south east of England. Most pupils are of white British background with a number from other cultures represented.
- 1.4 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum equivalence are shown in the following table.

School	NC name
Remove	Year 7
Lower IV	Year 8
Upper IV	Year 9
Lower V	Year 10
Upper V	Year 11
Lower VI	Year 12
Upper VI	Year 13

2. SUMMARY

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

2.1 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011.

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

2.2 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

1. Record formally the monitoring of all central records.

(iii) Progress since the previous inspection

2.3 The previous boarding welfare inspection was undertaken by Ofsted in February 2009. The school was recommended to review the protection provided for boarders' personal possessions and money. Each pupil is now provided with a personal safe in which to keep valuables.

3. COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS

3.(a) Boarding provision and care

- 3.1 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.2 The school welcomes all boarders with an extensive induction programme. New boarders are given different buddies for pastoral and academic activities and quickly make new friends. A weekend, intensively filled with activities, helps aid integration for new arrivals. Boarders have confidence in the adults in their house and feel able to ask all for help. The notice boards have lists of external contacts, and pupils know they can turn to an independent listener. [NMS 2]
- 3.3 The school has a very well-equipped and well-staffed medical centre where local doctors hold regular surgeries. All boarders are accommodated in rooms with one or two beds, and have a comfortable common room where friends are welcomed. The school has clear policies which are implemented fully, both in the medical centre and in the houses, where prescribed and homely medicines are stored in locked cupboards, dispensed appropriately and recorded properly. Accidents are clearly recorded and investigated. Older pupils are allowed to self-medicate having first signed to acknowledge that they understand the procedure. Pupils' confidentiality is respected and they are able to receive appropriate treatment outside school if necessary. [NMS 3]
- 3.4 Boarders have many ways to keep in contact with family and friends through the internet, house landlines and mobile phones. There is restricted internet access in houses, with older pupils being permitted increased access. [NMS 4]
- 3.5 The living accommodation, which is in well-maintained buildings, is clean, bright and comfortably furnished with homely touches being added as pupils personalise the dormitories. Rooms vary in size: younger pupils sleep in four or five bedded rooms, whereas most Year 13 pupils have single rooms. Arrangements for work also vary with age; older pupils work in their rooms, while younger pupils have supervised prep in classrooms or house common rooms. Houses have suitable and sufficient washing facilities, with modern shower cubicles providing complete privacy. Houses are warm and well ventilated. Disabled facilities are available on ground floors. Access to the houses is monitored so that boarders feel safe. CCTV is not intrusive. [NMS 5]
- 3.6 Boarders enjoy the wide selection of nutritious food they are given, and special diets are catered for. The ambience and round tables at meals promote friendly and relaxed meal times. Food is hygienically prepared. Pupils have access to labelled drinking water and snacks in house kitchens; fresh fruit is always available in the houses. [NMS 8]
- 3.7 Laundry facilities are efficient, and boarders each have a safe for storing valuables. The large tuck shop is well stocked with stationery and personal items. [NMS 9]
- 3.8 A very full programme of sporting, cultural, artistic, and service opportunities is available during the week and at weekends. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaires some pupils said that they did not have a good range of activities in the evenings and at weekends, but in interviews during the inspection, pupils commented on the very large range of activities available to them. Records of activities and the school calendar confirmed a varied and extensive programme. Sporting fixtures and trips are arranged at the weekend, balanced with time and space to relax and socialise. Boarders have easy access to information about the

world outside school with television, newspapers and assemblies, which reflect current issues and events. [NMS 10]

3.(b) Arrangements for welfare and safeguarding

- 3.9 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.10 Detailed policies and procedures, including a comprehensive manual, support the welfare, health and safety of boarders throughout the school. The procedures for ensuring boarders' safety when on and off the premises address all reasonable risks. Boarders confirm that they feel safe in the houses and on the school site. [NMS 6]
- 3.11 The school complies fully with the fire regulations. Measures to prevent risk from fire are thorough. The procedures for evacuation in the event of fire are clear and regular fire drills take place in the daytime and at night. Records of these drills enable the school to refine the procedures to ensure they are appropriate for all areas. The school undertakes systematic fire prevention checks and safety audits, keeping detailed records. [NMS 7]
- 3.12 The school makes the required arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all of its pupils. These include appropriate policies and documentation, together with the regular training of all staff, as well as of prefects. The headmistress and head of boarding are designated child protection officers. The governors carry out their responsibilities for safeguarding, and the full board receives, and actively reviews, termly reports on the implementation and effectiveness of the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. [NMS 11]
- 3.13 Pupils and staff understand the school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies, which comply with relevant legislation and guidance. Boarders report that bullying is rare and are confident that should any instances occur they would be resolved swiftly and effectively. Although some pupils indicated in the pre-inspection questionnaires that they thought the giving of sanctions and rewards was unfair, in interviews during the inspection boarders said that any sanction imposed was fair and proportionate though often a quiet word was sufficient. Good behaviour is encouraged and rewarded. Boarders get on well together in friendly, homely boarding communities, as was observed by the inspectors. [NMS 12]
- 3.14 The school follows safer recruitment procedures and the central register of appointments is accurately maintained. Visitors to the school are supervised and do not have access to boarding accommodation, except with the permission of house staff and under their supervision. Residents on the premises who are over 16 and are not employed by the school have disclosure and barring service checks, and have signed agreements about the terms of their residence. [NMS 14]

3.(c) Leadership and management of the boarding provision

- 3.15 The school meets all of the NMS under this section
- 3.16 The school has a concise statement of boarding principles and practice, and both parents and pupils receive handbooks and guidance giving detailed information about the practicalities and philosophy of boarding. The inspection team found that the pupils understand fully the contribution made by boarding to their education. [NMS 1]
- 3.17 The leadership and management of boarding are inextricably linked with the management of the pupils' academic lives. Links between academic and boarding

staff are maintained primarily by the pupils' individual tutors and by heads of section. Fairness and consistency between the houses are monitored by the leadership team and aided by common and house handbooks, meetings and guidance. The staff in each house undertake self-assessment each year, from which they create the development plan for the following year. Senior boarding staff are appropriately trained and experienced, and have access to external training courses. Records specified in the NMS are maintained and evaluated regularly although the evaluation is not always formally recorded. The school leadership has responded fully to the recommendation from the previous inspection by providing each pupil with a safe in which to keep valuable possessions. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaires, parents indicated that they were very happy with boarding provision in the school [NMS 13]

- 3.18 All staff who are involved in boarding have job descriptions and handbooks which reflect their duties. Induction includes safeguarding, first aid, fire safety and health and safety training; in addition, the school provides opportunities for staff to continue their professional development, aided by the appraisal system. Some resident staff have spouses and families, and their roles are clearly defined. Whether on or off site, sufficient, appropriately qualified, staff supervise boarders. At all times, boarders are under the responsibility of an identified, competent member of staff. Staff keep a check on the whereabouts of boarders by various means, and are clear about the procedure to follow in the case of any unexplained absence of a pupil. At least one adult member of staff sleeps in each boarding house overnight. Staff know where they can obtain emergency support if it is needed. Boarders know where the staff are to be found and how to contact them at night. Resident staff all have private accommodation with suitable private washing facilities, separated from those provided for the boarders. Boarders do not enter staff accommodation except under proper supervision. [NMS 15]
- 3.19 The school has an equal opportunities policy and boarders interviewed during the inspection confirmed that they had not experienced discrimination on any grounds. Boarders from overseas and those with SEND spoke of the support which they had received from the school and in their houses. The school has a three-year accessibility plan which is reviewed annually. [NMS 16]
- 3.20 In responses to pre-inspection questionnaires, some boarders expressed the opinion that the school did not listen to their views. However, inspectors found that boarders have several ways in which they can contribute their views about the running of the school. Each house has a weekly council, representatives of which attend the weekly school council meeting and report back on it. There is a food committee and an anti-bullying committee. In each house, older pupils gather views from younger boarders and take them to the house staff. The pupils' diary sets out details of how to make an informal or formal complaint. Pupils are able to make suggestions about activities and their suggestions for charity fund-raising are encouraged. [NMS 17]
- 3.21 The school has an appropriate policy on responding to complaints that complies with the relevant regulatory standards. There have been no formal complaints recently and every informal complaint is dealt with promptly and recorded. [NMS 18]
- 3.22 Heads of house and sixth formers have a substantial role in mixed age and junior houses. They spend time talking with the younger boarders, listening to their views and helping them with difficulties such as homesickness. They apply for their positions and receive training for them. They do not issue sanctions but liaise with the house staff if they encounter problems. [NMS 19]
- 3.23 The school does not arrange lodgings for boarders. [NMS 20 not applicable]