



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

BISHOP'S STORTFORD COLLEGE PREP SCHOOL

MARCH 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Bishop's Stortford College Prep School			
DfE number	919/6007			
Registered charity number	311057			
Address	Bishop's Stortford College Prep School Maze Green Road Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 2PH			
Telephone number	01279 838583			
Email address	prep@bishopsstortfordcollege.org			
Headmaster	Mr. William Toleman			
Chair of governors	Dr Philip Hargrave			
Age range	4 to 13			
Number of pupils on roll	574			
	Boys	312	Girls	262
	Day pupils	523	Boarders	51
	EYFS	39	Pre-Prep	83
	Prep	452		
Inspection dates	1 to 2 March 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 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, 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 a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses 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

Mr William Ibbetson-Price	Reporting inspector
Mrs Gillian Bilbo	Accompanying inspector
Mrs Clare Dawe	Team inspector (Director of Studies, IAPS school)
Mr Alex Osiatynski	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr Anthony Lowery	Team inspector (Director of Studies, IAPS school)
Mr Jason Hyatt	Team inspector for boarding (Deputy Head, IAPS school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Bishop's Stortford College Prep School is an independent day and boarding school for boys and girls aged between 4 and 13. The pre-prep admits pupils aged 4 -7, and the prep school caters for pupils aged 8 – 13, almost all of whom transfer to the senior school, which is on the same site. Bishop's Stortford College was established in 1868 as a non-conformist grammar school for boys. The Prep School opened in 1902 and the pre-prep in 1995, when the College became fully co-educational. The College is a registered charity whose trustees are members of its Governing Council. Since the previous inspection, a new headmaster has been appointed and a new classroom block has been built providing nine teaching rooms as well as a library and a drama/dance studio.
- 1.2 The prep school has its own buildings, but also makes use of facilities shared with the senior school including the swimming pool, dining room and playing fields. Boarders are housed in a discrete building with separate areas for boys and girls. They are looked after by resident house parents, assisted by matrons, tutors and GAP students. Pupils can board on a full, weekly or flexible basis.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a broad and varied educational experience which helps its pupils to develop into well-rounded, adaptable and interesting young people who are confident and self-assured and who have a sense of responsibility and care towards others. The school seeks to produce young people who will contribute constructively to society and play a full role in it, whatever their chosen path.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional or business family backgrounds, all generally living in the surrounding area. The majority of the pupils are of white British origin, but a significant minority come from a range of different ethnic backgrounds. The school has identified 63 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which includes dyslexia, all of whom receive additional specialist support. No pupils have an educational, health and care (EHC) plan or a statement of educational needs. English is an additional language (EAL) for 33 pupils, two of whom receive specialist support. The school provides a variety of enrichment opportunities for the most able pupils as directed by the gifted and talented co-ordinator.
- 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>
Lower Shell	Year 3
Upper Shell	Year 4
Form 1	Year 5
Form 2	Year 6

Lower Third	Year 7
Upper Third	Year 8

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in February 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Extend further the opportunities for older pupils to express their views and to take part in making decisions about aspects of school life.
 - Monitor the time spent on homework to ensure that it is reasonable and productive.
- 1.7 The recommendation of the intermediate boarding inspection in April 2013 was:
- Upgrade the boys' downstairs washroom and lavatories in the boarding house.
- 1.8 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspections.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Pupils demonstrate excellent levels of skill, knowledge and understanding across all areas of the curriculum and in their extra-curricular activities. The school is successful in fulfilling its aim to be a place of learning where its pupils can fulfil their potential in all areas.
- Pupils make excellent progress and are encouraged by their teachers and the inspiring learning environment provided for them by the school.
- Pupils of all ages have excellent attitudes to learning and demonstrate high levels of self-esteem and confidence in all the activities offered by the school. They have a thirst for knowledge and participate whole heartedly.
- ICT is a strength of the school with excellent facilities supported by a stimulating curriculum. Pupils are able to apply their skills across all areas of learning. However, the much used and valued virtual learning environment does not yet encompass all subjects.
- Some pupils feel that marking of their work does not help them know how well they are doing academically or how they can improve.

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

- Pupils work collaboratively in every aspect of school life both in lessons and elsewhere.
- Pupils are mature, self-confident and exhibit high levels of social and cultural awareness. They have strong moral integrity and a thoughtful and sensitive spiritual understanding. They understand the importance of responsibility and service to others.
- They are impressively self-disciplined and their personal development is characterised by excellent standards of behaviour and respect for each other and for their teachers.
- Personal development is fostered by a multitude of rich and vibrant opportunities provided for them at all ages and excellent pastoral care.

Recommendations

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

- Extend and enhance the virtual learning environment to include all curriculum areas.
- Ensure that all marking is of the same high standard as the best so that pupils know how they are doing in all subjects and classes.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 The school successfully meets its aim to be a place of learning with a broad and balanced curriculum that enables all pupils to fulfil their potential in everything they undertake. Pupils of all ages make excellent progress as they move through the school. The school does not take part in national curriculum tests, but the available evidence, including that of standardised tests, shows attainment to be above average in relation to national age-related expectations. Pupils achieve good results in selective senior school entrance examinations, and a significant number of them have received awards and scholarships for academic success, sport, music and art.
- 3.3 Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) make excellent progress from their starting points. Their interests and aptitudes are recognised at an early stage and used to develop a programme of interesting and engaging activities to personalise their learning. Their progress is carefully tracked and where appropriate, effective interventions are put in place to support and reduce any gaps that are evident. Children enjoy their learning and quickly develop skills that help them understand that they can make their own decisions. In a pre-prep geography lesson, children used an atlas to choose their own island to investigate online. Regular and comprehensive communication and review, involving all staff, ensures that they understand every child's individual strengths and areas for development and that they are carefully tracked and addressed appropriately.
- 3.4 Throughout the school, pupils are highly articulate. They begin to develop this ability in the EYFS where they question confidently and express their ideas and views intelligently. They enjoy conversing with each other and with adults and are keen to make their point, whilst also showing sensitivity to the views of others. This skill is encouraged and supported by teachers who plan opportunities for speaking and listening activities, such as through paired work to investigate language used in advertising. Teachers always give children time to express themselves, so building their confidence. Older pupils use language very effectively to communicate, persuade or question. On *World Book Day*, in a masterclass held by a visiting author, prep school pupils demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the connections between a book's central character, his personality and links to the paintings of Lowry. In another class, pupils used the technically accurate language of ratio and proportion to explain the concept of enlargement. This skilful use of the spoken word is transferred to the page and the high quality of pupils' extended writing develops rapidly year on year, culminating in the oldest pupils having an excellent understanding of grammar, spelling and syntax appropriate to their age. Opportunities to practise public speaking are plentiful from an early stage, and include drama and the giving of presentations in assemblies. Pupils are encouraged to pursue their own interests at a high level and are given the time and space in which to do so, for example when preparing for challenging musical performances or developing their skills for their sporting endeavour.
- 3.5 Pupils with SEND or EAL are very well supported to achieve highly in relation to their starting points. When areas of concern are identified, the specialist staff undertake classroom observations, provide specific diagnostic testing and prepare an individual learning plan for each pupil. Progress is then tracked carefully and specialist staff provide effective support, both during lessons and in one-to-one or group sessions. More able pupils are effectively challenged in class to extend their own learning and undertake research projects in their own time. In the pre-prep, more able children make swift progress and respond positively to additional challenges, such as when a small group of pupils did some extension work with a

teaching assistant on compound words. Subject staff are particularly adept at providing appropriate challenge and allowing pupils time to consider their approach to a task. This was seen in a DT class where pupils were designing and making their own egg cup and the teacher encouraged pupils to consider their plans and to analyse and amend as necessary. Consequently, pupils become independent, resilient and confident learners who are prepared to test their ideas and progress well. In the lessons and activities observed, pupils demonstrated perseverance and adaptability. In a junior class where pupils found the mathematics work challenging, individuals were encouraged to believe that they could succeed and were rewarded for doing so.

- 3.6 Pupils, from the EYFS onwards, learn to reflect upon and review their work so that they can improve their learning. Much of the marking and oral feedback by teaching staff is of the highest calibre and challenges understanding, drives improvement, and celebrates work of a high standard by making it clear what has worked well, and suggesting ways in which it can be improved. Pupils said that many staff gave freely of their time to work with them individually to ensure a deeper understanding of what they need to do to improve. Nevertheless, in the questionnaires and in interviews pupils said that they didn't always find marking helpful nor did they know how well they were doing in some subjects. Inspectors found inconsistencies in the quality of marking both within and across subjects and year groups, with some being perfunctory and irregular.
- 3.7 Mathematical skills are very well developed throughout the school. Frequent mental mathematics sessions aid fluency and understanding, such as practising number bonds generated from cutting a pack of playing cards. Pupils can manipulate numbers with confidence and do so across the curriculum, as was seen in science lessons, where graphs were created and reviewed. Pupils show resilience as they apply their mathematical knowledge when problem solving, recognising which operations are needed. In a senior maths lesson, pupils were confidently forming algebraic expressions for problems linked to shapes, while in another lesson GCSE questions were offered as extension tasks when studying shape enlargement. From an early age, pupils are challenged to compete in mathematical competitions both nationally and against other schools, and they do so successfully.
- 3.8 From the earliest stages, pupils confidently use ICT across the curriculum to support their learning, notably in mathematics. Pupils are competent at programming, word processing and coding on desktop computers or tablets. As they move through the school, pupils increasingly use the wide range of ICT resources and other information sources, such as the library, to develop their ability to analyse the results of their research and synthesise their findings to enhance their understanding. An older ICT class produced a project comparing different types of laptop and chose their own method of presenting the information, showing great familiarity and competence with a variety of programmes. Pupils say that the new 'bring your own device' (BYOD) initiative has greatly enhanced their learning, allowing them to make notes and record results for analysis later. They also value the virtual learning environment (VLE) which enables them to revisit material or to catch up if they have missed a lesson. They wished that the VLE was more developed, covered all subject areas and was embraced by all teachers.
- 3.9 Pupils of all ages develop strong musical, artistic and dramatic skills. The numerous choirs and instrumental groups give many opportunities to perform. Committed and innovative teaching allows pupils to build their skills in the creative arts and apply them across other areas of the curriculum. Pupils enjoy many opportunities to participate in assemblies, dramatic productions and concerts. This ensures that, at all stages, they are confident and capable performers, as was witnessed during a school drama production. Regular book clubs and other opportunities

to make the most of the exceptional library facilities are well attended and much enjoyed by the pupils.

- 3.10 Pupils are successful in both team and individual sporting events. They are assisted in their success by the wide programme of sporting activities, superb on-site facilities and excellent coaching. As they mature, pupils develop their sporting abilities to an increasingly accomplished level, and this has resulted in the school teams achieving very good results in local and national tournaments. Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. They approach their work and play with good humour, are highly enthusiastic and motivate themselves and their peers in their learning. They enjoy learning, want to learn, and are determined to succeed, resulting in a commendable level of perseverance. They enjoy working collaboratively and willingly exchange ideas and debate ways to proceed, as was seen in an art lesson where the whole group worked together using felt to produce a joint piece of artwork. They are equally comfortable working independently, as inspectors saw on numerous occasions, including when senior pupils investigated instruments used in an orchestra. The ethos of the school underpins their attitudes to work by instilling self-discipline and a positive attitude. The pupils are spurred on to try hard by highly supportive teachers in a nurturing environment. Consequently, they demonstrate very well-developed abilities to take their own learning forward; they are willing to take risks and celebrate their own and others' success.
- 3.11 The clear majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed great satisfaction with the range of subjects provided within the curriculum and the high levels of teaching throughout the school. A very small minority of parents felt that there was not a good choice of extra-curricular activities available. Inspectors reviewed the options available and observed a number of activities and concluded that there is a large and varied range of opportunities for extra-curricular activities which provides pupils with many options to develop skills and their own interests to a high level. Pupils themselves confirmed both in their questionnaire responses and in interviews, that they felt that there was a wide range of activities to choose from which were both interesting and stimulating.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils develop very high levels of self-confidence as they progress through the school. By the time they move to senior school, they are content with who they are and have developed a level of maturity and self-esteem beyond that expected for their age. The highly committed and caring boarding and day staff have been successful in providing a warm and welcoming environment that underpins the aim of the school to promote a strong Christian ethos with a genuine care and concern for the well-being of others. The excellent pastoral care evident throughout the school contributes strongly to the pupils' personal development. Pupils grow in confidence, flexibility and resilience as they progress through the school and are aided in their development by the provision of a well-structured assembly programme, a comprehensive personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, and a range of opportunities for them to take on responsibilities within the school community. They know that they will be supported by their teachers even when they get things wrong. Prefects are given the opportunity to research and suggest a range of charities for support during their tenure, the final decision being determined democratically by all pupils. Those pupils who are not chosen to be prefects have other opportunities within their forms and houses to take on other responsibilities.
- 4.3 From the EYFS onwards, pupils make decisions daily, such as how to use their free time, how to deal with friendship issues and how to take responsibility for their own actions. As they get older, they take decisions regarding their learning such as choosing their own level of challenge. By taking on increased responsibility as they get older, pupils develop an awareness of how their decisions affect themselves and those around them. Their ability to organise themselves translates into skills which they use to good effect as they gather the ideas of their peers for school council and house meetings. Decisions made in these forums have a positive effect on their school. Pupils decide which fundraising activities they will adopt in order to raise money for their chosen charities. They also suggest changes which they believe will improve the school experience, such as alterations to the menu. Boarders said that the boarding experience encourages them to take responsibility for their possessions and their actions, and that they know their decisions may affect others. Through effectively used feedback boxes, pupils contribute to the development of boarding and this helps promote a feeling of ownership and responsibility among the boarders which assists with their personal development.
- 4.4 The school's ethos prevails throughout the school, and is evident in the pupils' ability to reflect upon, and articulate, their thoughts on faith and spirituality in its broadest sense. A room is set aside for quiet contemplation and pupils may visit this whenever they wish. A group of pre-prep pupils were debating very sensibly and with valid arguments, the notion of whether God was kind. Pupils develop a strong spiritual understanding, as was seen in an inspiring assembly on the true meaning of Lent as an opportunity to put aside the material aspects of life and to focus upon spiritual values such as love and faith. In the EYFS, the woodland learning environment gives children a chance to reflect upon the wonders of the natural world and an appreciation of the change in the seasons. In a prep school religious education (RE) lesson, pupils discussed the causes of and justification for war, referring to past and current conflicts.
- 4.5 From an early age, pupils display a well-developed sense of right and wrong and a strong moral compass. Prep school pupils said they knew who to turn to for advice and see it as their duty to contribute to the school ethos in this way. They are aware that communities need to abide by a set of rules to ensure the well-being of all its members. Classes devise their own rules and

codes of behaviour which run alongside the school behaviour policy. In pre-prep these included phrases such as 'be kind and gentle' and 'take responsibility for your actions'. As a result, behaviour in the school is exemplary. Pupils move around the school in a relaxed but well-ordered fashion. At meal times in the dining hall, they exhibited excellent manners. The boarders benefit greatly from the warm family atmosphere in the boarding house, where they learn how to live with others and share their experiences in a safe and supportive community. Pupils are strongly supportive of each other and of the school as a whole. They understand and respect the system of reward and sanction and work with staff to ensure a happy and safe environment. In the questionnaire, a minority of pupils felt that staff were not always fair in the way that they gave out sanctions and rewards. Scrutiny of the system for the recording of these, showed that sanctions were very rarely used and in discussions during the inspection, pupils were very clear that any sanctions which were awarded were fully justified.

- 4.6 Pupils are socially aware and take their responsibilities for others very seriously. They work well together in lessons, and when preparing for a drama production or musical performance. In a prep school mathematics lesson, pupils helped each other, so that all could succeed. The very caring sense of community within the school and in the boarding house underpins the pupils' social development and awareness of their place within the wider world.
- 4.7 All pupils take pride in contributing to the lives of others, both within the school, and further afield through their charitable work. This begins at an early age, for example, with pre-prep pupils acting as playground buddies. Older pupils take on a range of supervisory roles in the school, such as mentoring younger pupils, and conducting school assemblies. Older boarders also take on responsibilities, assisting staff with the smooth running of the boarding house. Pupils develop an extremely good understanding of the nature of charity work through ongoing support for a range of charities both local and national. A recent visit from a representative of a local charity for the homeless, raised awareness of a current issue.
- 4.8 Pupils respect and value diversity within the school. As they mature they have a growing awareness of world faiths. In RE they study all the major religions of the world and regularly share festivals and customs with pupils from different backgrounds and religions. This ensures that pupils can explore and challenge their own faith, as well as understand the opinions of others. Pupils actively enjoy welcoming their peers who come from different backgrounds and take pride in ensuring that they are confident and happy in their new surroundings. Pupils were adamant that respect for others was an accepted norm within school and couldn't conceive of a situation when anything other than tolerance was shown.
- 4.9 Even the youngest children at the school develop a secure understanding of what constitutes a healthy and balanced lifestyle. They make good choices at lunchtime, and, supported by the proactive catering department, ensure that their plate of food is a balanced one. The opportunities for exercise are numerous, including timetabled PE, swimming and games, but with additional opportunities for less formal exercise through activities and play. The personal, social and health education programme, which is delivered through tutor time, is a strong contributory factor to these excellent outcomes for pupils.
- 4.10 A vast majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire were supportive of the way that the school does everything it can to ensure that their child learns in a healthy and safe environment, actively promotes good behaviour and the values of democracy, tolerance and respect for those with different faiths or beliefs. A very small minority of parents and pupils said the school does not deal well with bullying. In interviews with pupils, selected from all year groups, pupils said that bullying was very rare and expressed complete confidence in their teachers and the leadership to sort out the few instances which did occur. Inspectors scrutinised the anti-bullying policy, the record of serious sanctions and the records of all

incidents. They found that the school takes bullying extremely seriously and monitors even the smallest incident to identify patterns and provide support and advice to all parties concerned.

- 4.11 Pupils are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education. They leave the school ready to meet their next set of challenges as capable, resilient and confident young people.