



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION**

**HOLMEWOOD HOUSE SCHOOL**

**FEBRUARY 2017**



## SCHOOL'S DETAILS

<b>School</b>	Holmewood House School			
<b>DfE Number</b>	886/6012			
<b>Registered charity number</b>	279267			
<b>Address</b>	Langton Green Tunbridge Wells Kent TN3 0EB			
<b>Telephone number</b>	01892 860000			
<b>Email address</b>	admin@holmewoodhouse.co.uk			
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr James Marjoribanks			
<b>Chairman of governors</b>	Mr Jeremy Thompson			
<b>Age range</b>	3 to 13			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	445			
	<b>Boys</b>	250	<b>Girls</b>	195
	<b>Day pupils</b>	425	<b>Boarders</b>	20
	<b>EYFS</b>	72	<b>Preparatory</b>	373
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8 to 9 February 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 the chairman 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**

Mrs Karen Williams	Reporting inspector
Mr James Foley	Team inspector (Headmaster, IAPS school)
Mr Crispin Cole	Team inspector for boarding (Deputy head, IAPS school)

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## **1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **About the school**

- 1.1 Holmewood House School is an independent day and boarding school for boys and girls aged between 3 and 13 years. It is owned by Holmewood House Properties Limited and is controlled by a Board of Governors, who are also directors of the company and the school. Founded in 1945 as a boys' school, the first girls entered in 1990 and the school is now fully co-educational. It accommodates weekly and flexi-boarders.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection in 2011, the school has undertaken significant building work and several new appointments have been made to leadership positions.

### **What the school seeks to do**

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a challenging and stimulating environment where excellent teaching and pastoral care enable all pupils to thrive and achieve their full potential, whilst promoting values which are essentially Christian. It also seeks to ensure that pupils achieve the standard needed for entrance to their chosen senior schools, and that those with the potential have an opportunity to attain scholarship standard.

### **About the pupils**

- 1.4 Pupils come from a wide geographical area and from a range of professional backgrounds. Nationally standardised data provided by the school indicate that the ability profile of the pupils in the school is above average. The school has identified 46 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 32 receive support for a variety of needs. No pupil has a statement of special needs or an education, health and care plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 18 pupils, 6 of whom receive support in class or individual sessions. The most able pupils are challenged through scholarship classes, and sporting and performing opportunities.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

### **Recommendations from previous inspections**

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in March 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking and reporting to the standard of the best, where targets for improvement are clearly defined.
  - Develop the strategic development plan of the school to include clear cost implications, timelines and success criteria.
  - Unify formal evaluation systems to ensure that information is used productively to meet the different needs of pupils.
  - Facilitate throughout the school, including in the EYFS, the regular systematic monitoring of teaching and sharing of identified good practice.
- 1.7 The recommendations of the intermediate boarding inspection in February 2013 were:
- Ensure that risk assessments indicate that they have been read and understood by all relevant members of staff and have been monitored by a senior manager.
  - Ensure that at least one member of the resident boarding staff is trained at a higher level in fire-fighting and evacuation.
- 1.8 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspections. Further detail is given in the main text of the report.

## **2. KEY FINDINGS**

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

- Pupils of all ages and abilities make excellent progress.
- Pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are developed to an excellent and sometimes exceptional level.
- Pupils of all ages display excellent communication and numeracy skills.
- Pupils' independent study skills are less well developed.

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

- Pupils are highly confident, motivated and self-assured.
- Pupils appreciate the values of friendship and faith.
- Pupils have a strong understanding of right and wrong.
- Pupils' respect for those of different backgrounds is highly developed.
- Pupils enjoy co-operating with each other, but opportunities for them to do so are limited.

### **Recommendations**

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement:

- Extend opportunities for pupils of all ages to develop independence, initiative and collaborative learning in lessons and activities.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils of all ages and abilities, including those with SEND or EAL and the most able, make excellent progress across all areas of school life. The proportion of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) attaining the Early Learning Goals is above the national average. Those with SEND or EAL make rapid progress when they enter the school and gain entry to their senior schools of choice, which is in common with their peers and in line with the school's aims. This is enabled by highly focused teaching and strong support for individual pupils from teaching staff, who use the school's evaluation systems to good effect to identify and respond to pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Pupils' positive and hardworking attitudes are fostered by the school's fulfilment of its aim to create an environment where success is recognised and achievement is celebrated. The celebration of pupils' wide range of achievements motivates them to apply themselves fully to all that they undertake, thus ensuring progress. Almost all pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that they have good opportunities to learn and make progress, a view echoed by almost all parent respondents.
- 3.3 Pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are developed to an excellent and sometimes exceptional level. The pupils are confident and engaged learners who respond with enthusiasm to the teachers' high level of expertise, which enables them to develop their skills to an advanced level and those with a particular talent to excel. Pupils' confidence and desire to succeed are fostered by the high status awarded by the school to sport and the arts as well as to academic subjects, and by their secure knowledge of how to ask for help should it be needed. Artwork of an exceptional standard is displayed around the school, and pupils benefit from group projects with a visiting sculptor and pupils from local schools, as well as highly experienced and effective teaching. Physical skills are developed from the earliest age. Pupils display confidence in their use of equipment outdoors; older pupils demonstrated highly developed racket skills in a tennis lesson, which they improved by analysing each other's performances and offering suggestions for improvements. The school's recently adapted humanities curriculum requires older pupils to select their own topics to investigate and to engage in challenging discussions. Pupils learn about philosophy and coding, and achieve at a high standard in geography, history and religious studies (RS) where they extend their knowledge and understanding through independent research. Achievement in music is outstanding; high levels of performance were observed from individual musicians and in the whole-school hymn practice, where pupils sang with enthusiasm and skill. Pupils display excellent levels of understanding in languages and of scientific concepts. The broad range of subjects and activities enables pupils to find their strengths and pursue their passions; almost all pupils and parents are pleased with the range of subjects and most are happy with the choice of extra-curricular activities.

- 3.4 Pupils of all ages display excellent communication skills. They are attentive listeners, confident speakers and accomplished writers from the EYFS onwards. Pupils demonstrate high-level speaking skills in their drama productions and examinations. They speak with confidence in class, where personalised and challenging questions enable them to become fluent and descriptive in the spoken word. Engaging and focused lessons, and excellent relationships between themselves and teachers ensure that pupils develop their communication skills across the curriculum; pupils were observed discussing how to create a spooky atmosphere in a ghost story, sharing ideas in mathematics and engaging in role play in RS. Written work is of a high standard in all subjects, and in pupils' high-quality history and RS projects. In class, pupils display a mature understanding of the English language, such as when pupils in Year 7 applied their knowledge of poetry and iambic pentameter to the writing of sonnets and discussed whether the use of rhyme was appropriate.
- 3.5 Pupils are highly numerate and demonstrate an infectious enjoyment of their mathematics lessons, where engaging teaching and the provision of a range of activities for pupils' different abilities ensure excellent progress. They enjoy the opportunity to select their own level of work and assess their own success, and learn much about what to do next from their teachers' responses in class and their books. Pupils find teachers' support helpful when they experience difficulties and say that they are made to think for themselves in these circumstances. Pupils employ their skills with confidence when solving problems in mathematics lessons and when working in other subjects. For example pupils in Year 1 used their knowledge of multiples of five to answer questions about money, whilst those in Year 8 applied their knowledge of simultaneous equations to different problems. Pupils' application of their mathematical skills and knowledge is highly effective in geography, design and technology (DT), the sciences, and in history where pupils in Year 7 used Venn diagrams to illustrate the causes of the Civil War.
- 3.6 Pupils' achievement in scholarships, competitions, local and national events, and the performing and other arts is excellent. In fulfilment of the school's aims, pupils including those with SEND or EAL gain academic, music, drama, art, DT and sports scholarships. Their preparation for these is supported by highly focused teaching, extra-curricular activities and excellent relationships between teachers and pupils. Pupils enjoy excellent results in external drama examinations, performing with confidence and aplomb in drama productions. Their artwork has been included in national exhibitions. Musicians are particularly accomplished, benefiting from the opportunity to begin learning instruments in Year 1 and passing examinations at levels that are often well beyond expectations for their age. Pupils have excelled in sport at local and national level, reaching and often winning competition finals in athletics, swimming, gymnastics, judo, shooting and squash. Pupils have a feeling amongst them that anyone can achieve at the highest level once they know what they are best at.
- 3.7 Pupils are confident in their use of information and communication technology and use their skills across the curriculum, where planning for effective use of technology in the classroom ensures their continual progress through regular opportunities to use and extend their skills. They undertake research on tablet devices in the classroom, produce project work electronically and use computer software for their musical compositions. Pupils with SEND are very well supported by technology, which enables them to express their thoughts and demonstrate their understanding fluently and confidently.

- 3.8 From the very youngest age, pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning. They are highly attentive and engaged, and enjoy taking a leadership role in their learning when the opportunity arises. Pupils' initiative and independence are less well developed, as opportunities for them to develop these skills are not widespread throughout the curriculum. Pupils collaborate well when they are challenged to do so, such as when designing a board game in DT, working together to solve problems in mathematics and in games lessons. In these instances, the pace of lessons and variety of activities provided contribute to the pupils' success. Pupils' study skills are developing as the range of opportunities for them to analyse and hypothesise in their lessons widens. Pupils demonstrated the ability to reason when unravelling a musical code and when analysing a video about internet safety. They relish opportunities to carry out research projects in the new humanities programme where they select their own path within a particular theme, carry out research, draw upon a range of sources and report their findings, such as in projects on Shakespeare and modern poetry. The school has sought to develop these skills particularly through the humanities programme, but activities that do so are not yet consistently provided in all subjects.

#### **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils are highly confident, motivated and self-assured. They are fully involved in school life and thrive within its positive and purposeful environment, in fulfilment of the school's aims. Leaders ensure that all pupils feel valued by celebrating their successes, whatever they may be. Pupils develop high self-esteem as a result, and are able to recognise, celebrate and accept their own and each other's strengths and weaknesses. Pupils understand what they must do to improve, and their teachers' carefully directed support and encouragement help them to develop the necessary resilience to persevere. Children in the EYFS speak confidently to new people and happily spend time engaging in activities on their own, identifying their own mistakes and the actions needed to rectify them. Pupils speak with enthusiasm of the support that they receive from teachers in identifying their strengths, and of the school's emphasis on mutual co-operation and the value of taking part in activities at every level.
- 4.3 Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong. The vast majority of pupils' and parents' questionnaire responses expressed that the school promotes good behaviour, and this was borne out by the exemplary behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school. Pupils hold rules in great respect and understand why they are necessary. They appreciate the fact that their school rules are not restrictive and understand the school's pastoral systems well. Pupils say that expectations of their behaviour are clear, that they are supported when they 'get it wrong', and that the approach to discipline in the school is one of 'common sense'. Pupils readily take responsibility for their actions and are sufficiently confident to acknowledge when they are in the wrong, displaying a strong sense of conscience. They are well supported and encouraged by the clear and consistent application of effective pastoral policies by adults, whom they clearly hold in high regard.
- 4.4 Pupils are highly appreciative of the non-material aspects of life, and of opportunities within the school day to be quiet and reflect. They particularly enjoy listening to music before the start of assemblies and quiet reading times when, in their words, 'you can step into the world of your story'. Pupils in Year 3 displayed a strong sense of empathy when considering the feelings and fears of Mary and Joseph when Jesus was lost in the temple, and pupils in Year 7 discussed the metaphorical nature of poetry and considered the relative importance of the pillars of Islam. Pupils value friendship highly, from the EYFS where children defined friendship in simple terms to older pupils who recounted instances of making new and unexpected friends when working in teacher-directed pairs and in the boarding house, demonstrating a mature appreciation of the value of a rich and diverse friendship group.
- 4.5 Pupils' respect for those of different backgrounds is highly developed. They speak knowledgeably about different faiths and cultures, as they are informed about such through the sharing of different faiths in lessons and assemblies, and the content of RS and personal, social, health and citizenship education classes. In their questionnaire responses, almost all parents and pupils felt that the school encourages pupils to have respect for others and to be tolerant of those with different faiths and beliefs. Respect for others was evident in interactions between all members of the school community, and pupils' responses in interview suggested that this was all but taken for granted. Boarders are particularly aware of the need to accept those of different backgrounds, and appreciate the opportunity that boarding provides to get to know more about each other than would be possible during the school day.
- 4.6 Pupils are confident when making decisions both in and out of the classroom. Children in the EYFS make confident choices about which activity to engage in around the classroom, pupils choose which level of task to undertake in maths lessons, and older pupils enjoy the challenge

of making sensible choices about their behaviour as they move around the school campus with considerable freedom. Pupils appreciate the trust invested in them in these circumstances, and boarders enjoy the additional responsibility of deciding which preps to do when, and how to spend their free time.

- 4.7 Pupils enjoy the many opportunities provided to take part in activities with peers of different ages. Boarders of all ages are enthusiastic about activities times; when older pupils invent and run games for younger ones. Children in the EYFS share books and play games sociably in the classroom and outdoors. Activities such as music ensembles, plays and team sports offer opportunities for pupils to work with each other, but the directed nature of these limits opportunities for pupils to solve problems or work towards common goals.
- 4.8 Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities in school, and these are valued and respected. All pupils in Year 8 have a responsibility, which includes such varied jobs as helping younger pupils and operating the theatre's light and sound systems. The school values a caring approach, encouragement, good manners and generosity, all of which are evident in the demeanour and actions of the pupils. Year 1 work on display demonstrated pupils' awareness of the need to help others, and pupils are appreciative of each other's achievements. Pupils are unfailingly polite around the school and in lessons, and are keen to support charities and help others less fortunate than themselves. They participate in fundraising for a number of local, national and international charities, such as a foundation to support education and medical provision in Kenya which prompted pupils in Year 2 to set up their own toy fair, and a national charity for the elderly for which pupils shared harvest baskets at the local centre. Each house supports a different charity each year, and the pupils enjoy deciding by which means to raise funds for charities based at home and abroad.
- 4.9 Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, saying that the high expectations of their teachers enable them to become self-disciplined, punctual, organised and independent. Those who board on a weekly or flexible basis are highly appreciative of the value of staying away from home before leaving to go to full boarding schools and of the free time they are provided, during which they exercise self-discipline in making sensible choices about how to spend their time. The school provides highly personalised support for pupils and their parents in helping them to decide upon their next school, based on academic and personal considerations such as the standards required to secure a place and the distance from pupils' homes. Pupils are confident and happy with their choices, and this is complemented by the school's success in helping pupils gain places at their first choice of schools.
- 4.10 Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. They appreciate their healthy food in school and the many opportunities to take exercise in lessons, activities and boarding time. Pupils have a secure awareness of the dangers of cyberbullying, fostered by the curriculum and events such as anti-bullying week. They are aware of the need to stay safe around school, which is reinforced in assemblies and in specific lessons such as DT. Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, with one pupil describing it as 'a slice of everything'.