



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

FINBOROUGH SCHOOL

9 TO 10 NOVEMBER 2016



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Finborough School			
DfE number	935/6062			
Address	Finborough School The Hall Great Finborough Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 3EF			
Telephone number	01449 773600			
Email address	admin@finboroughschool.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mr Steven Clark			
Principal and proprietor	Mr James Sinclair			
Age range	2 to 18			
Number of pupils	368			
	Boys	193	Girls	175
	Day pupils	321	Boarders	47
	EYFS	27	Juniors	154
	Seniors	150	Sixth Form	37
Inspection dates	09 to 10 Nov 2016			

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 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 unmet 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 grade descriptors 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 in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they 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 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 proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and an assembly. 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 Ruth McFarlane	Reporting inspector
Mr Steven Boyes	Team inspector (Former principal, ISA school)
Miss Joanna Gay	Team inspector (Deputy head, ISA and IAPS school)
Mr Nicholas Marchant	Team inspector (Housemaster, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Finborough School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged 2 to 18. The school is set in grounds covering 60 acres in Great Finborough, Suffolk and was founded in 1993. The principal became proprietor of the school and responsible for its governance in September 2013, having taken on this role from his father. A new headteacher took up his post in September 2015 and leads and manages the whole school, which is a change to the previous structure.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has developed a new multi-purpose sports complex, a coffee shop staffed by sixth-formers, new computer facilities, a new area for the sixth form and refurbished accommodation for boarders and dining. The school has four sections: the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children from the age of 2; a prep department for pupils aged 5 to 11; a senior school for pupils aged 11 to 16 and a sixth form for pupils aged 16 to 18. Boarders are accommodated in two boarding houses, one for girls and one for boys.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide each pupil with the best preparation for life and it aspires to apply its motto, 'Strive for the Highest', to all aspects of a pupil's life, including academic, sporting and personal health.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional and business backgrounds, mostly from white British families living within a 15-mile radius of the school. Boarders are admitted from the age of nine. They come from a range of British and overseas locations. Currently, 85 pupils have special educational needs and/or difficulties (SEND), mostly for dyslexia, all of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs or an education health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 11 pupils, whose needs are supported in class, as well as in individual or small group sessions. Data used by the school have identified 60 pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and eight other pupils because of their special talents in sport. All pupils in the sixth form follow individualised programmes.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from the previous reports

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was a Standard inspection in September 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Ensure that procedures are in place for those with responsibility for governance to maintain consistent oversight of regulatory matters.
 - Ensure greater consistency in the implementation and monitoring of whole school policies and procedures.
 - In the EYFS, ensure consistency in writing provision for the needs of individual children in daily plans, including individual targets for children in written reports to parents.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning and their well-honed study skills are a significant factor in their success.
- Pupils' achievement over a range of subjects and activities is excellent throughout the school, whatever their starting points.
- Pupils' attainment in public examinations such as GCSE has risen significantly in the past two years.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) skills are sophisticated but pupils' use of the available learning technologies, in the classroom, is not fully developed.

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

- Pupils have wholeheartedly adopted a system devised by the head to promote their readiness for their future lives and this underpins their excellent personal skills.
- Pupils are adaptable and self-disciplined; they persevere extremely well in all they do.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well; they take full responsibility for their behaviour, and adopt a strong moral code.
- Pupils are self-confident and resilient. They have a keen focus on self-improvement and are sharply aware of the approaches required.
- Not all pupils believe their voice is heard and acted upon in school.

Recommendations

2.3 To further enhance the excellence of its provision, and thus raise outcomes further, the school may wish to consider making the following improvements:

- Show pupils how to make more widespread use of the available technologies in the classroom.
- Develop further opportunities to capture and act positively on the pupils' views to enable all to feel collaboratively engaged in decisions for the school's development.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 The excellent quality of pupils' achievements is rooted in their outstanding attitudes to learning. These have been developed from a highly effective programme devised and introduced by the new leadership, which it calls 'Learnability', or 'the desire and ability to quickly grow and adapt one's skill set in order to stay relevant and succeed'. 'Learnability' underpins pupils' approaches throughout the school and it is having a significant impact on pupils' ways of working and their progress at all ages. The system, brought in as part of a restructuring of governance and leadership that improved all aspects recommended by the previous inspection, enables pupils to check their own progress frequently alongside their tutor, who provides individual feedback with half-termly targets identified for the next steps. In this way, pupils control the pace and direction of their learning. Pupils, including those with SEND, take delight in the constant challenge, in which they take the initiative without waiting for tasks to be set. They are relentlessly willing learners, working equally effectively whether by themselves or with others. All the pupils who took part in interviews were effusive about the system and explained how the process, in line with the school's aims, has encouraged them to strive for the highest levels and to be the best they can be. They wholeheartedly adopt the 'work to succeed' ethic that is promoted in the prominent display in the entrance hall, in which the key habits for learning are identified under the banner, 'Lead to Learn'.
- 3.3 Pupils are reaping the benefits, as attainment is excellent in relation to pupils' abilities. In the Foundation Stage Profile, which measures attainment at the age of five, results are well above the national average. This represents excellent achievement for this age group and range of abilities. In the prep department, pupils do not take part in national curriculum tests, but their attainment is well above average. This is evident in pupils' performance in lessons, their workbooks and interviews. This also represents excellent achievement.
- 3.4 In the senior school, performance at GCSE has risen sharply in the past two years. While in the years 2013 to 2014 results were similar to the national average for maintained schools, in 2015 they were above that average, and in 2016 they were well above that average, from cohorts with a similar ability profile. Standardised measures of progress show that pupils achieve above expectation, compared to their ability on entry. Set against the school profile, which includes a relatively high proportion of pupils with SEND, this represents excellent achievement. It reflects improvements in teaching, as demonstrated by the now well-established management systems introduced by the new leadership, which monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress far more rigorously than previously. The systems fully involve pupils in the monitoring of their own progress as well as the setting of their learning targets. By giving the pupils primary responsibility for their own learning, the school has a strong drive for improvement that is understood and shared by pupils, parents and staff.
- 3.5 In the sixth form, individual achievement at A level is often good from pupils' starting points. In 2013 and 2014, A-level results were in line with the national average for maintained schools. In 2015 and 2016, raw results improved. The introduction of the extended project qualification has considerably broadened pupils' learning. This initiative has also helped to develop pupils' study skills. Pupils throughout the school increasingly draw on a wide range of sources and can analyse them and hypothesise with increasing maturity, developing imagination and vibrancy, as in a graphic design project that achieved the highest mark nationally at GCSE level in 2016. On leaving, pupils have gained places at their first choice

universities despite most of them having started their sixth form courses with more modest GCSE results than the average for sixth form students nationally.

- 3.6 Pupils with SEND and those with EAL achieve particularly well at all ages, compared with their starting points. This is because they are supported in their learning by expert and experienced staff who know how to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding across the curriculum and encourage them to strive for challenging targets. The more able pupils and those with particular talents respond positively to their adapted curriculum and special arrangements, such as fitness regimes and menus, so their talents and abilities are promoted to the full. This is reflected in the successes of individual pupils in the theatre, music and sport.
- 3.7 Pupils' attainment is often excellent in the good range of extra-curricular activities and sports on offer. Prep school pupils and teams have won national or regional tournaments in rugby, swimming and athletics. Senior teams have been undefeated in rugby and netball. In arts subjects, Finborough School regularly has multiple winners in the regional literary arts festival. A few parents and a small minority of pupils, in their response to the questionnaire, indicated that they think there is not a good choice of extra-curricular activities, but the school's enrichment programme offers two hours per week for most pupils. Pupils are achieving well in the current activities which include outdoor education, using the spacious grounds, and some activities that also include parents, such as yoga, badminton, netball and football. Younger pupils much enjoyed the recent 'Firework Carousel'. This popular set of activities included making a paper firework, making a rocket bookmark, firework blow-painting, making a firework out of a bottle and using science to make fizzing fireworks and glitter in a bottle.
- 3.8 Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding develop to an excellent extent across the full range of learning, including scientific, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative education. In music and art, pupils often make excellent progress. The artwork displayed across the school and in the art room is of a high standard. All the pupils develop good skills in physical education and sports activities; quality in this field is not confined to those who do so well in team competitions.
- 3.9 Pupils' communication skills are strong at all ages. They are strengthened by the approaches of skilled staff. Pupils soon become highly articulate, commensurate with their starting points, and show a high level of competence in speaking and listening. Progress in writing in the EYFS has improved significantly in response to the excellent work undertaken to improve this aspect, which involve the early years coordinators in formulating and monitoring policy, as recommended in the previous inspection. A poetry presentation session with juniors, where pupils recited the Firework poems they had written, displayed, time and again, eloquent, confident and vibrant presentations. Senior pupils' communication skills are honed further through the six-weekly cycle of assembly presentations. The standard observed here is high: the sessions give all senior pupils regular opportunity to communicate with a larger audience. Reading skills develop to an excellent extent, reflecting the impact of high-quality teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) from the start of the EYFS and the individual attention given to pupils in their reading development, whether for pupils who have learning barriers or those whose high ability demands extra challenge to sustain progress. In mathematics, pupils make excellent progress. Many pupils told inspectors that mathematics is their favourite subject. From a glance into mathematics lessons while they are taking place, it is easy to understand why. Pupils respond quickly to each new challenge here and have many opportunities to apply mathematics skills in other subjects.

- 3.10 Pupils' technological skills are developing well as they respond to the new excellent resources in this area. They are adept in the technical aspects of computer lessons in the new computer suite, but pupils' use of the learning technologies available in the classroom is not fully developed and this means that they are not always given sufficient opportunity to apply these skills to other areas of learning.
- 3.11 Pupils' excellent achievements are the result of the strong impetus given by the leadership at all levels on ensuring each individual becomes a highly effective learner. The meticulous tracking and regular feedback to the pupils underpins their progress. The daily checks on teaching quality by managers are fully supported by all staff and are a significant factor in the rise in achievement. Almost all the parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that the teaching enables their child to make good progress. School data show overwhelmingly that this is the case for pupils of all abilities.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 The most significant reason for pupils' excellent personal skills is their understanding of their own strengths and areas for development which is the result of their adherence to the 'Learnability' programme. This prepares them for their future lives and is fully in keeping with the school's aims. Pupils work confidently with others to achieve common goals. As a result of this, pupils fully understand how to improve their own learning and performance, and they readily use their own initiative. For example, they are pro-active in devising ways that they can contribute to their community and the wider world. Recently, junior pupils organised, by themselves, a charity cake stall to support the Marie Curie charity. Other junior pupils made water games and organised events to support the Water Aid charity. Sixth formers are the baristas in the school's Café Bar, which they have learned to run as a viable business.
- 4.3 Pupils fully concur with the school's motto, 'Better Never Stops'. This has strong resonance in their high levels of self-discipline and adaptability. The school's high expectations of the pupils, and their own awareness, contribute strongly to the development of these qualities; as does the supportive ethos experienced in the boarding houses, where boarders' progress and development are frequently monitored.
- 4.4 Pupils and boarders behave exceptionally well and show full understanding of what is right and wrong. They demonstrate a strong moral code. From an early age, they take full responsibility for their own behaviour and learning in response to the school's highly effective and successful systems that manage and develop pupils' personalities to an excellent degree. Class and behavioural rules are clear and are known by all. Records and observations showed that these are applied fairly, not supporting the views of a small minority of pupils who indicated in the questionnaire that staff are not always fair. Pupils can explain eloquently the need for the rule of law in society.
- 4.5 Pupils' 'stickability' and their willingness to persevere are abundantly evident at all ages. For example, EYFS children concentrated fully on picking up small pieces of glitter with chopsticks and tweezers, developing good hand-eye coordination and dexterity. Skills are well developed because pupils and boarders are supported well by staff and are thoroughly encouraged to try things and know exactly what they are aiming for. They begin with the end in mind. This is visible across the school in many subjects. Pupils concentrate well on their work, spurred by a clear idea of what the end result should look like. It is also evident in the personal skills of SEND and EAL pupils, who show a strong-minded determination to persevere when faced with difficulties.
- 4.6 At all stages of the school, the pupils display strengths in their spiritual development appropriate to their ages. Pupils' spiritual experience is enhanced and enriched at all ages, through the activities provided for them. Pupils are looking forward to this year's production of *Oliver*. The pupils show a vibrant interest in all that is going on at school and in the world. They commented spontaneously on how much they appreciated the glorious sunset viewed on the horizon as they played rugby. They fully appreciate the beauty of the extensive estate grounds in which their school is set, in all its autumn beauty. Whether it is in woodland classroom activities for the youngest pupils, outside learning for older pupils or the many opportunities to appreciate the impressive artwork on display, pupils take all opportunities to appreciate the non-material aspects of life. Pupils, particularly the senior ones, also show strong understanding, commensurate with their age, of some of the philosophical elements of the world religions. Spirituality is evident in unexpected places: in a recital by juniors of

poems they had written about fireworks night, pupils brought the impact of the fireworks vividly to life with such lines as 'like exploding flowers in the night sky'.

- 4.7 Pupils' make a strong contribution to their society. They talk enthusiastically about the high levels of tolerance and respect felt around the school. They show great respect to all their fellow pupils, whatever their background or abilities, as well as adults and visitors. School buddies provide social and cultural support for pupils from other pupils, developing leadership qualities as well as excellent social skills in those who serve in these roles. The school's SPACE (Spiritual, Personal and Community Education) programme is a prominent feature of school life and runs through the school. This includes a 'thought of the week' which covers aspects of religion, friendship and leadership. The leadership aspect embraces the seven habits that are embedded in the culture of the school and are the guiding principles in its ethos. Sixth formers make a key contribution to the local and wider community through their service as medical volunteers at the local hospital and junior pupils enjoy links with a group of local primary schools. Supplementing their charitable giving and cultural development, pupils take part in trips and expeditions to places such as to Iceland, New York, and Jordan.
- 4.8 Pupils have a profound understanding of how the decisions they make will affect their futures. In many aspects of school life, they participate in decision making. This occurs, for example, through their individual half-termly target setting with their tutors, as part of the 'Learnability' programme. Not only does this offer strong support for their academic learning, it also hones pupils' personal skills through strengthening their self-knowledge and ability to know how to improve. Through this system, pupils develop excellent skills and personality traits that are useful for their futures, including resilience and self-esteem. In the questionnaire responses, a small minority of pupils sought more guidance on careers and subject choices, showing a clear understanding of the importance of informed decision making to their futures. A few parents also indicated that advice about subject choices and careers is not good. Inspectors found that pupils are given abundant advice and guidance. Indeed, older pupils with whom this was discussed could readily outline their pathways to careers already chosen.
- 4.9 Pupils of all ages cooperate highly effectively with each other, often working in small groups in class and in the grounds. Activities are frequently planned and managed by the pupils themselves. An excellent example is the juniors' current work designing a water theme park, which includes budgeting among other arrangements, and writing a persuasive text to present to adults in a 'Dragons' Den' style project. However, pupils' opportunities across the whole school to collaborate in decision making for whole school issues is less evident. This view is implied in their responses to the questionnaire, where, although strongly positive in many aspects, such as encouraging respect for other people and tolerance of those with other faiths and beliefs and helping pupils to learn how to keep safe, concerns were raised by a small minority of pupils about fair treatment by staff. While no unfair treatment was observed nor evident from records, the school leadership agrees there could be more opportunities for pupils to be involved in whole school decisions.
- 4.10 Pupils rapidly develop many of the skills necessary for their future lives. They make confident choices, spurred on by the strongly supportive pastoral system that underpins the school's ethos. Pupils are knowledgeable about keeping safe, especially in terms of internet safety. They enjoy the carefully selected food menus available in the dining hall and are aware of how to stay emotionally and mentally healthy. They get plenty of exercise through play activities, sports sessions and extra-curricular activities. Pupils take full responsibility for their own actions and decisions and, as they develop, they have increasingly frequent

opportunities to do so. They know well that these decisions have a strong impact on their future lives.