



ISI

Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

WITHAM HALL PREPARATORY SCHOOL

30 NOVEMBER TO 01 DECEMBER 2016



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Witham Hall Preparatory School			
DfE number	925/6015			
Registered charity number	507070			
Address	Witham Hall Preparatory School Witham-on-the-Hill Bourne Lincolnshire PE10 0JJ			
Telephone number	01778 590222			
Email address	secretary@withamhall.com			
Headmaster	Mr Charles Welch			
Chairman of Governors	Mr Jeremy Sharman			
Age range	4 to 13			
Number of pupils on roll	249			
	Boys	141	Girls	108
	Day pupils	125	Boarders	124
	EYFS	19		
	Pre-prep	64	Prep	185
Inspection dates	30 Nov to 01 Dec 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 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 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 chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and 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 Linda Donowho	Reporting inspector
Mr Michael Connolly	Team inspector (Headmaster, IAPS school)
Mr Christopher Sparrow	Team inspector for boarding (Head of boarding IAPS school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Witham Hall School is an independent co-educational boarding and day school situated on the outskirts of the village of Witham-on-the-Hill, Lincolnshire. It caters for pupils from the ages of four to thirteen. The school was founded in 1959 and became a charitable trust in 1978. It is managed by a board of governors.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has added many facilities including a significant extension to the pre-prep building, new science labs, a computer suite, and a library and resources centre. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is situated in the pre-preparatory department, which is for pupils up to age 8. Another building on the same site accommodates the older pupils. Pupils can board from Year 4 upwards on either a weekly or flexi basis. The boarding accommodation is situated on the first and second floor in the main building.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to enable each child to achieve their own academic and physical potential by providing a curriculum that is broad and balanced, and that offers a wide spectrum of opportunities within academia, art, drama, music, technology and sport. It aims to foster positive attitudes to learning and life, encouraging each child to develop self-discipline and confidence whilst promoting a sensitivity to others within a Christian environment.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of business and professional backgrounds, mostly from the local area. Their ability profile is above the national average. The school has identified 40 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), 22 of whom receive additional specialist support. The others are catered for mainly in lessons. No pupil has an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs. The school has no pupils who speak English as an additional language. More able or talented pupils are catered for in lessons and through the system of grouping pupils by ability for mathematics from Year 6, and for English and science from Year 7, as well as through the extra-curricular activities available.
- 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 inspections of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in November 2010 and an intermediate (boarding) inspection in December 2013. The recommendations from those inspections were:
- Share best practice in teaching across the curriculum and age groups.
 - Further develop the role of subject co-ordinators, especially in leading and monitoring the curriculum.
 - Implement more formal systems for monitoring the quality of the EYFS, and clearly define the roles and responsibilities of EYFS staff.
 - Incorporate into written planning the extension activities provided for the most able children in the EYFS.
 - Extend the range of risk assessments to give greater consideration to the boarding house.
- 1.7 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspections. Further detail is in given in the main text of the report.

2. KEY FINDINGS The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils' numeracy skills are very strong due to the leadership's successful strategies to raise achievement in this subject.
- Pupils achieve high standards in music and creative arts as a result of their lively enthusiasm and the school's emphasis on the value of creativity.
- Pupils achieve well across a wide range of extra-curricular activities due to their highly positive attitudes to learning.
- Throughout the school, pupils have well-developed skills in information and communication technology (ICT).
- Pupils have strong literacy and reading skills, and express themselves verbally extremely well. They have fewer opportunities to develop writing skills to the same level, particularly for older pupils.

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

- Pupils are confident and resilient, and demonstrate excellent understanding of how to improve their own learning.
- Pupils take on responsibilities within the school with enthusiasm and maturity, and they work together well.
- Pupils understand how important making the right decision is to their future lives.
- Pupils are extremely self-disciplined and their behaviour is exemplary, ensuring harmony around school.
- Pupils have a strong appreciation of their own culture and that of others, and display considerable sensitivity towards those less fortunate than themselves.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Enable pupils to develop writing skills to the high standard that they achieve in reading and mathematics.
- Develop further the system for monitoring the progress of pupils, ensuring that it is comprehensive and the information is consistently and effectively used to enable best progress for all.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 Pupils respond with success to the well-planned initiatives of the school's governance, leadership and management which have focused on the school aims to provide a curriculum that is broad and balanced, and that offers a wide spectrum of opportunities within academia, art, drama, music, technology and sport while fostering positive attitudes to learning. In doing so, pupils are reaping the benefits of the work that has encouraged staff to share best practice, and raised the quality of the subject co-ordinators' checks and the monitoring of pupils' progress. These benefits demonstrate that the school has successfully dealt with the recommendations of the previous inspections.
- 3.3 Pupils' key strength is in the development of their numeracy skills, backed up by the leadership's strategies to raise achievement in this subject. As a result, the impact of the teaching of mathematics is excellent throughout the school. Pupils participate enthusiastically in mathematics activities and achieve high results. In the EYFS, children use numbers confidently in their play and teachers utilise every opportunity to model mathematical language. Older pupils display a strong knowledge and understanding of mathematical principles and apply these well in problem solving; more able pupils regularly meet challenges using their mathematical knowledge. Pupils apply their knowledge to other subjects skilfully, as observed in a geography lesson where they appropriately interpreted a graph with bars representing rainfall, and lines for maximum and minimum temperatures.
- 3.4 Pupils are competent speakers who happily and confidently discuss, co-operate and share ideas, and demonstrate considerable maturity in the quality of their discussions. From the EYFS onwards, they are inquisitive learners and confidently ask questions. They articulate their ideas clearly, and regularly ask perceptive questions to further their knowledge and vocabulary, using appropriate subject-related vocabulary in lessons. Pupils' increasing language abilities allow them to hypothesise and analyse, which they readily do. They do not have regular opportunities to apply these skills to their writing.
- 3.5 Pupils talk with infectious enthusiasm about the many lively creative and musical activities in which they achieve so highly. Communication skills such as reading, speaking and listening are particularly strong throughout the school. This is partly due to the encouragement of pupils to take part fully in the performing arts, which they consequently do. Pupils, especially the younger ones, have extremely positive attitudes to learning and participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities with great enjoyment and enthusiasm. Boarders benefit from the range of activities after school through a well-planned cultural and leisure programme, which they display enthusiasm and eagerness to take part in. At busy academic times, boarders use the 'Study' which acts as a revision centre with members of staff there to help. This means that pupils respond positively to all aspects of the boarding experience. When pupils board, their progress often accelerates.
- 3.6 Day pupils and boarders achieve success in an abundance of sports and activities due to the exceptional range of opportunities provided, their enthusiasm and determination, and encouragement from staff. These successes include hockey, rounders, rugby, equestrian pursuits and archery. Pupils are frequently awarded scholarships in sport and other areas including academic and performing arts at ages 11 and 13 to selective senior schools. Other successes include winning a local radio station's general knowledge competition and recent first places in a regional drama festival.

- 3.7 Pupils from an early age are confident and able in their use of ICT; they have a pro-active and knowledgeable approach to using the school's interactive resources. For example, pre-prep pupils successfully worked together to move a programmable toy around an obstacle course. Such opportunities also demonstrate pupils' finely honed communication skills, as they confer with each other and make decisions as to how best to operate the toy.
- 3.8 Attainment in the EYFS is good. Children make good and often rapid progress in their learning and development relative to their individual starting points, abilities and needs. The strong focus on reading ensures that children quickly gain a thorough knowledge of sounds and letters, and begin to transfer this knowledge to their writing. Challenge for the most able children in the EYFS is now written into the planning and staff have more defined roles, addressing the related recommendations of the previous inspection. The children display a love of books, and progress well in their reading. They enthusiastically made lists together when preparing for their 'expedition to the North Pole'. At the end of Reception an above-average proportion of children reach the Early Learning Goals set for this age group, particularly in literacy skills, numeracy and social development. Their understanding of the world is greatly encouraged through their visits to the schools 'Wilderness and Wildlife area' and the imaginative themes that form their curriculum.
- 3.9 Pupils attainment by the time they leave Year 8 is judged to be above the national average for maintained schools, based on inspection evidence drawn from the observation of lessons, a scrutiny of work, discussions with individual pupils and checks of school data. This level of attainment, as judged, indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. Less able pupils and those with SEND make excellent progress, as they are extremely well supported and their progress is carefully monitored by the leadership and management. More able pupils respond to the improvements in challenge in lessons, and many of them accelerate their progress as a result. This work to challenge pupils effectively and ensure best progress for all is being extended by the leadership to include all pupils of all abilities. The developing tracking system carefully assesses the progress of all pupils in mathematics and English, but is not yet fully developed or used consistently.
- 3.10 Pupils have many opportunities to investigate learning independently and to use their initiative. For example, pupils in science understand and apply the principles of scientific investigation and are confident in estimating and predicting their findings, such as when junior pupils investigated the properties of soil and demonstrated a clear understanding of why different samples will have different physical properties. They offered reasonable conjectures to explain these differences using appropriate vocabulary and identified that soil is crucial to the food chain.
- 3.11 Pupils demonstrate steadily developing study skills as they move through the school. They apply these skills appropriately in their independent work due to the staff encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning; staff encourage and sensitively support pupils and provide interesting topics and scenarios for discussion, debate and research. Prep pupils in a religious studies lesson interpreted a list of features for places of worship to create a model, working in small groups. Other prep pupils analysed problems effectively, devising a suitable algorithm to solve multiplication involving three-digit numbers. These examples demonstrate pupils' positive response to learning and has resulted in achievement that is good and sometimes excellent over a wide range of subjects and activities.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils know their strengths and their weaknesses, and display excellent understanding of how to improve their own performance. They have a calm but embedded confidence due to the leadership and all adults in school promoting the school's pastoral aims very well. Self-reflection is an integral part of lessons, and pupils regularly celebrate their own achievements and those of their peers as a result of staff ensuring that pupils are rewarded frequently and their achievements recognised. The 'WHOLE passport' (the 'Witham Hall Overall Learning Experience') underpins this recognition and helps pupils develop the high levels of resilience evident. Pupils are consistently encouraged to put forward their ideas and are not afraid of making errors; they said that this supports them in improving their work and that they are assured that their teacher will offer valuable advice and assistance when necessary. In an English lesson, pupils recognised that they could enhance their own work by sharing their ideas with a partner and respecting ideas that differed from their own.
- 4.3 Pupils' high self-esteem is fostered through the 'Learning For Life' programme which prepares them for future challenges and experiences. In interview, pupils expressed how much the school mentoring system helps them develop confidence. In this system, pupils are vertically grouped across all year groups and meet regularly with a dedicated member of staff to discuss and celebrate individual achievements within the school and the community. Pupils' high self-esteem is also underpinned by the variety of reward systems in place, including those for boarders. Boarders in interview said that rewards are plentiful and sanctions few and rarely necessary, as their love of boarding ensures that they are respectful of rules and expectations. Pupils value the recognition of their achievements.
- 4.4 Pupils take on responsibilities in school conscientiously. They respond enthusiastically to the opportunities that they are provided and they work well with others. Pupils demonstrate a mature understanding of their personal freedom and of decisions which they can take at each stage in their development, as this is nurtured from an early age. For example, the EYFS children are regularly encouraged to choose their own activities and make decisions in collaboration with their peers whilst selecting resources and deciding on roles. They are encouraged to make choices regarding which books they look at and they take full advantage of the plentiful resources on offer. The new outside area allows children the regular choice of indoor or outdoor play. Older pupils are aware that the decisions they make affect their future lives. For example, pupils know how to keep safe. Through the 'Learning For Life' programme, pupils are advised about and provided opportunities to discuss safety issues. The induction process for boarders ensures that safety procedures are afforded high priority. Pupils are aware of how to keep safe when using computers and are confident that they have a member of staff to turn to should any concerns arise. The regular reminders and specialist speakers reinforce pupils' understanding of how to keep safe, and the need to stay fit and healthy. Regular exercise is a significant focus of school activities, and the school ensures that it is enjoyable and meaningful. The food committee members are unanimous in their appreciation of the food provided and boarders are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the choice and standard of food and its impact on their future lives. Decision making is encouraged across all aspects of school life. Older pupils engaged fully with the assignment of discerning the minimum age to ride a scooter, have a tattoo, serve on a jury and acquire a passport. Pupils enthuse about the challenge of group decisions; boys in a rugby lesson understood that the decisions they made were a significant factor in the outcome of the rugby match.

- 4.5 Boarders said that the boarding experience encourages them to make decisions and take responsibility for their possessions and their actions, and that they know their decisions may affect others and therefore respect the decisions made by their fellow boarders. Through the boarding committee, pupils have the opportunity to contribute to the development of boarding and build on the improved work regarding identifying risk. Coupled with effectively used pupil feedback boxes, this helps promote a feeling of ownership and responsibility among the boarders which is key for personal development, and meets a previous inspection recommendation.
- 4.6 Pupils make an exceptional contribution to the life of the school through their roles as prefects, sports captains, house captains, and school council and boarding representatives. They recognise that both school councils are a democratic way for their views and aspirations to be aired and considered. The advent of 'School Colours for Service' has brought an added dimension to the rewards for good citizenship, leadership and effective fulfilment of responsibility.
- 4.7 From the EYFS onwards pupils take great responsibility for their behaviour and understand that their actions may affect others and that poor behaviour has consequences. Pupils are committed to the 'Witham Way'. The community spirit engendered through boarding does much to establish a community that respects rules and democracy. Pupils have a keen understanding of right and wrong, and are determined to continue the harmonious ethos that pervades the school. They are extremely self-disciplined, which stems from the promotion by all staff of the school aims to encourage each child to develop self-discipline and confidence whilst encouraging a sensitivity to others within a Christian environment.
- 4.8 Pupils have a well-developed understanding of what it means to be British, and an appreciation of other cultures and of people who are different from themselves. They display great sensitivity to each other and those less fortunate. Pupils are aware and understand the significance of different religions. They appreciate why certain elements of the synagogue have a special significance and command great reverence, and are able to compare and contrast different places of worship for Abrahamic religions. Pupils said that the boarding experience unites them in a community of acceptance and understanding. All faiths and cultures join together as one community, sharing day-to-day activities in harmony.
- 4.9 The quality of the pupils' spiritual development is evident throughout the school. The 'Witham Way' promotes sharing, respect, forgiveness and listening, and underpins actions and attitudes for all pupils. Pupils are proud of these values and are confident and self-aware. They have a consistent understanding of non-material aspects of life. The strong focus on creative arts offers pupils opportunities to perform music to a high standard, and pupils demonstrate confidence in performing and enjoy sharing their music with others which thus forms a significant element in their spiritual development. The high quality of art on display around the school reveals the pupils' appreciation of beauty and their capacity to think beyond day-to-day issues. They strongly value the opportunities provided to experience these aspects of school life.
- 4.10 Pupils are very aware of the needs of others beyond their school, and the whole school actively contributes to those in society who are less fortunate than themselves. A wealth of charities and good causes have benefited from the school's fundraising activities, many of which pupils have chosen themselves. The whole-school commitment to its project in Cambodia is a significant example of pupils' determination to help others. Respect and understanding of others' needs and cultures is afforded high priority within the school community.

- 4.11 Pupils expressed that they feel well prepared for the next stage of their education. Boarders said that the boarding experience increases their independence and personal skills in readiness for full-time boarding in senior schools. Outside speakers and regular opportunities for pupils to discuss essential transition concerns ensure their seamless move at all stages of school life. Throughout the school, a sense of enjoyment and togetherness permeates all that pupils do. The boarding experience for older pupils is central to this as the flexi-boarding facility, which enables most pupils to experience boarding and creates a tight family body within the school. The positivity of the responses to both the parents' and pupils' questionnaires strongly confirms this.