

School inspection report

28 April to 1 May 2025

Northbourne Park School

Betteshanger

Deal

Kent

CT14 0NW

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders promote a nurturing and inclusive culture where pupils are known, supported and encouraged in all areas of school life. The school's values are reflected in everyday interactions and leaders' decision-making. Leaders demonstrate a thoughtful and responsive approach to improvement, shaped by feedback from pupils and parents. However, leaders' review of risk assessments is not yet as fully developed as possible.
2. Teachers deliver a suitably wide and ambitious curriculum designed to encourage pupils to become independent learners. Pupils achieve well across academic and creative subjects, with the bilingual French and English pathways supporting their effective language development and global outlook. Staff typically enthuse pupils about their learning and foster their curiosity and good progress. While teaching in the French pathways and in the early years are particularly responsive to pupils' needs, elsewhere teachers do not always adjust their teaching to support the learning of pupils with higher prior attainment as effectively as possible.
3. Staff foster a caring atmosphere where support of pupils' emotional wellbeing is central. Effective behaviour management and high behavioural expectations mean that pupils behave kindly, show empathy and build friendship. Boarding routines are well organised, and staff promote boarders' independence and self-esteem.
4. From the early years onwards, pupils take part in leadership roles and charity work that build confidence and responsibility. Pupils are prepared for the future stages of their education both in the UK and overseas, supported by effective transition planning.
5. Leaders prioritise safeguarding through effective staff training so that it is embedded in school life. Staff are confident in identifying and responding to concerns, including those specific to younger children and boarders. Leaders with designated responsibilities for safeguarding respond to any safeguarding concerns appropriately, including by referring concerns to external agencies when required. The safeguarding team keep accurate records of safeguarding concerns and the school's responses to these. Safer recruitment procedures are effective and in line with the requirements of current statutory guidance. Pupils learn how to stay safe, both online and offline, and know to whom they can report any safeguarding concerns.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that teaching methods and resources are always adapted when needed to support the learning of pupils with higher prior attainment as effectively as possible
- strengthen the review of risk assessments so that they are consistently informed and amended if required as a result of such review.

Material change request

6. Inspectors considered the school's request for a change to the details of its registration to increase the upper age range of pupils to 14 years and to increase the capacity from 205 to 220.
7. Leaders' plans to extend the curriculum and develop teaching are suitable and likely to meet the needs of pupils aged 13 to 14 years once the proposed increase in the upper age of pupils takes place. The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively and is likely to continue to do so once the proposed material change takes place.
8. Safeguarding arrangements, including those for boarders, reflect current statutory requirements and are likely to continue to do so once the proposed material change takes place. All required pre-employment checks are carried out, as are appropriate checks for those aged over 16 residing on site. A suitable single central record of appointments (SCR) is maintained. Risk assessments are up to date and include those relating to the proposed integration of older pupils, online safety and behaviour in boarding. Supervision levels are suitable, and staff have relevant experience working with pupils up to the proposed maximum age. Clear separation by age and sex is maintained in both boarding houses, with suitable sleep, shower and toilet facilities in place. The proposal to separate younger and older boarders within the house for male boarders is appropriately risk assessed and, if implemented, would mirror the suitable arrangement in the house for female boarders.
9. Boarding accommodation is warm, comfortable and of good quality, with boarders able to personalise spaces and store their possessions securely. The boarding houses are clean, well maintained and secure, with external access controlled and CCTV installed appropriately to record outside activity. Medical and welfare provision is suitable and accessible, with medically trained staff on site and suitable systems in place for recording and responding to pupils' health needs. There is

appropriate provision of food and drinks, including suitable options for pupils with medical, religious or dietary requirements. The boarding accommodation has sufficient capacity to cater for the proposed maximum number of boarders.

10. Health and safety and fire safety procedures, including regular checks and maintenance of the premises and equipment and at least termly fire evacuation drills during boarding time, meet regulatory requirements and are likely to continue to do so once the proposed material change takes place.
11. Capacity exists within the current premises and staffing to accommodate the proposed increase in the maximum number of pupils. Sufficient staff are employed by the school to be able to teach and supervise the pupils effectively, and plans are in place to recruit more staff if needed. Teaching rooms, medical, dining and outdoor facilities are well equipped and have the capacity to cater for the proposed increase in the maximum number of pupils.
12. Leaders have planned effectively for the proposed material change and have a sensible rationale for desiring it. The management of boarding is effective and informed by active self-evaluation. Leadership is likely to continue to be effective once the proposed material change takes place.
13. It is recommended that the requested material change be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

14. Leaders ensure that school policies, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour and inclusion, are clearly understood and consistently applied by staff. Leaders review provision through lesson observations, work scrutiny and feedback from pupils, parents and staff, and act effectively on what they find. For example, feedback in the school's own surveys have led to curriculum enhancements in computing, drama and design and technology (DT). Pupils' views are actively sought and acted upon, with outcomes evident in relation to curriculum access, catering and boarding routines.
15. Leaders communicate and promote the school's aims and ethos effectively, so that the school's values are reflected in the attitudes and behaviour of staff and pupils. These values underpin leaders' and staff's inclusive planning, respectful relationships with pupils and responsive pastoral care. Pupils are confident, thoughtful and respectful, supported by initiatives that promote empathy, resilience and emotional wellbeing. Leaders promote a culture where pastoral support for pupils' wellbeing is central, creating a calm environment where pupils are known and valued. The school's motto, to 'learn it, live it, love it', is reflected in the way pupils typically engage with school life as they mature.
16. Leaders implement a clear and suitable complaints policy that is implemented effectively. Complaints are managed transparently and promptly, with detailed records kept and governors appropriately informed.
17. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. Regular reviews of the accessibility plan result in suitable adaptations such as ramps and assistive learning devices. Inclusive practices effectively support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Staff receive training and adapt provision to meet the needs of pupils who have SEND where needed. The school culture supports the participation and achievement of all groups of pupils, including those with physical, sensory and hidden needs.
18. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, such as safeguarding partners, to support pupils' wellbeing.
19. Leaders of boarding provision promote the school's values while offering a caring and structured environment for boarders to develop. In boarding, pupils enjoy a suitable balance of structured activities and free time, and staff promote respectful and equitable relationships, providing opportunities for pupils to express their concerns. Boarding routines ensure that pupils can contact home, and mechanisms are in place for pupils, including those who speak EAL, to communicate concerns confidently. Leaders of boarding have recently reviewed systems to ensure boarders are heard and supported and have taken clear actions designed to develop boarders' confidence in sharing any worries that they might have.
20. Risk management is broadly effective. Leaders identify and assess potential risks across the school's provision, including the premises, science, DT, trips and transport, and put in place appropriate measures to mitigate these. Leaders address site-specific risks through practical measures such as coded entry, supervised access and boundary walks with pupils. However, leaders do not always review risk assessments following any near misses or educational visits and as a result, any learning is not always translated into improved practice.

21. Governance is effective and provides informed support and strategic direction. Governors oversee all areas of the school's management to ensure that leaders utilise their skills and knowledge to meet their responsibilities and promote the wellbeing of pupils at all times. In doing so, they ensure that the school consistently meets the Standards.
22. Leaders ensure that all required information, including previous inspection reports, is accessible to parents through the school website and routine communication. Parents receive regular updates on their child's progress through reports and meetings with staff.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

- 23. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

24. The school provides a cohesive curriculum, clearly sequenced to progressively build pupils' knowledge from the early years to Year 8. A wide-ranging parallel French and English curriculum is in place. Pupils studying in French follow the French national curriculum in their core subjects to ensure that they do not fall behind with their French studies whilst spending time in an English boarding school. This runs alongside the English curriculum that is taught to all other pupils within the school, and pupils come together for creative subjects such as music and drama, as well as for sports lessons and activities. The French curriculum is delivered by bilingual staff to allow these pupils to access subject content within their chosen language while becoming immersed in English school life. Recent curriculum enhancements in drama and DT have effectively broadened pupils' interests and helped them develop their skills in these areas well. Early years children benefit from purposeful play and adult-led activities supporting early communication and language. Those with boarding responsibility ensure that pupils are supported in their academic development through structured prep, access to academic support and time for independent research. Staff provide clear targeted guidance that helps pupils to understand how to improve their work further, prepare for examinations and complete their studies successfully.
25. Teachers typically deliver lessons that build effectively on prior learning, promoting accurate vocabulary, independence and thoughtful questioning. Pupils respond positively, reflecting on their learning and using feedback to improve. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and use a range of well-chosen teaching methods, including modelling, group work and targeted questioning when helpful. These are typically used to help pupils develop their understanding and make progress. Verbal and written feedback enables pupils to articulate their next steps and how they can improve their work. Where practice is most effective, such as in the early years, science and those lessons within the French pathways, teaching is clearly adapted to meet individual pupils' needs. In these instances, staff modify language, pace and task, and pupils are fully included and progress well. However, elsewhere in the school, teaching is not always adapted to meet the learning needs of pupils with prior high attainment as effectively as possible.
26. In the early years, children benefit from high-quality adult interactions, open-ended questioning and rich language experiences that promote communication and language development. Learning is embedded in purposeful play with carefully planned opportunities for problem solving, creative expression and the development of independence. Outdoor learning is used to extend exploration beyond the classroom, with children confidently navigating routines, taking risks sensibly and working collaboratively.
27. Pupils who have SEND are identified through assessment on entry and provided with targeted additional support when required. Teachers use specific in-class strategies designed to promote their understanding. Staff share responsibility for ensuring access and progress, and teaching assistants collaborate with teachers to provide effective tailored support.
28. Pupils who speak EAL are well supported and benefit from teaching materials adapted to their needs and bilingual explanations when useful. Boarding staff consult with academic and pastoral teams to ensure pupils who have SEND or those who speak EAL are well supported during their boarding experience.

29. Leaders have recently implemented a revised assessment system that is used across the school to help track progress and inform teaching. A mix of standardised and formative assessment is used to monitor pupils' performance and plan any provision of additional support. The use of colour-coded tracking enables staff to identify pupils in need of support and review progress over time. In the French section of the school, assessment is used systematically to support pupils preparing for national examinations. Pupils make good levels of progress, and the majority are successful in their re-integration into the French system on their return to France. Assessment in the English pathway is used to guide curriculum planning so that teachers are able to support pupils in gaining places at their chosen senior schools.
30. The school provides a wide range of co-curricular and enrichment opportunities. Pupils participate in a range of activities that promote independence and collaboration. Opportunities such as outdoor exploration extend learning beyond the classroom. In the early years, children access creative and physical experiences, including nature-based play, which contribute to their development of observational skills. In boarding, pupils engage in structured and informal activities that complement the academic curriculum and promote social development and integration. They are also provided with additional support for their studies, helping them to make good progress.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

- 31. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

32. Leaders and staff maintain a warm and inclusive environment where pupils are trusted, respected and known. Pupils demonstrate high levels of emotional security, empathy and kindness in their interactions. Behaviour in both structured and informal settings is calm and respectful, with older pupils modelling care and patience and younger pupils showing confidence and independence. The school's high behavioural expectations are well understood, and behaviour is managed consistently and sensitively. Sanctions are infrequently needed but used proportionately, with systems adapted for individual needs. Bullying is rare and dealt with promptly when it occurs. The pastoral support and daily routines in place help pupils to feel settled and secure.
33. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme, assemblies, church services and opportunities for reflection. Staff promote pupils' spiritual understanding by teaching them about a range of beliefs and values and the importance of tolerance, respect and kindness. Pupils also develop their spiritual sensibilities through activities such as art appreciation and musical exploration.
34. Leaders ensure that the PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum is well planned and adapted to meet pupils' needs. Lessons provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. Single-sex sessions are used for more potentially sensitive content and parents are invited to review materials in advance, supporting a transparent and collaborative approach. Leaders make clear which elements of RSE form part of the compulsory science curriculum. Pupils develop a secure understanding of the principles of consent, tolerance and respectful relationships and engage with RSE content in a thoughtful and age-appropriate manner.
35. Teachers plan physical education (PE) and games lessons to develop pupils' motor skills, co-ordination and stamina, through a range of sports-specific skills that pupils apply to areas such as hockey, football, rugby and cricket. Staff ensure that activities are accessible for pupils who have additional needs by adapting lessons appropriately. Outdoor learning and informal play are well supervised and encourage creativity, independence and exploration. Pupils make healthy choices at mealtimes and benefit from nutrition education provided by visiting specialists and adult role modelling. Staff provide pupils in the early years with a range of activities and opportunities to develop their physical skills through a well-sequenced curriculum and suitable age-appropriate resources. Boarders participate in structured and informal activities that balance academic and personal development.
36. The boarding accommodation is clean, suitable and well maintained, providing a comfortable and secure environment for pupils. Leaders ensure that routines are consistent and age-appropriate, with clear expectations that promote independence. Staff provide attentive care and work closely with day staff to ensure continuity, particularly during transitions between day school and evening. Relationships between staff and boarders are warm and respectful, contributing to a calm and friendly atmosphere where pupils are settled and well supported. Leaders ensure that supervision is appropriate, with sufficient staff deployed across all areas. Appropriate staff-to-child ratios are maintained at all times in the early years.

37. The premises are secure and methodically maintained, with required checks and servicing of equipment carried out regularly and systematically. Effective fire safety procedures are well embedded across the school, including in boarding. Regular fire drills ensure that pupils are familiar with evacuation routines, and clear records of call-point tests and alarm checks are maintained. Leaders ensure oversight through scheduled internal inspections, and qualified external contractors regularly review procedures and operations. Staff demonstrate secure knowledge of emergency protocols and pupils understand what to do in the event of an alarm.
38. First aid provision is suitable. Trained staff, including those trained in paediatric first aid in the early years, are deployed across the site, and care plans are in place for those with medical needs. Systems for tracking and reviewing first aid are used to identify and address patterns over time. There are suitable procedures for the administration of any medication or first aid.
39. Leaders monitor attendance data regularly and inform the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points. Admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained and up to date and leaders use attendance information to help identify wellbeing concerns early. Leaders track boarders' attendance through co-ordinated systems between academic and boarding teams. Staff monitor the presence of all pupils at lessons and follow up any absenteeism. Effective systems are in place to support families and encourage good levels of pupil attendance.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

- 40. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

41. Teachers provide pupils with wide-ranging opportunities to develop their social awareness and sense of responsibility towards others. Pupils support local initiatives such as foodbank collections and care home visits and take part in civic events such as VE Day celebrations. Staff introduce global perspectives through lessons, assemblies and cultural events that help pupils understand diverse societies, global challenges and the interdependence of communities around the world. Pupils' understanding of these themes is further developed through partnerships with international schools and assemblies featuring visiting speakers. Pupils raise funds for a partner school in Uganda and learn about challenges faced by children in other parts of the world.
42. Teachers develop pupils' understanding of diversity through bilingual storytelling, exploring cultural traditions in literature and class discussions on themes such as equality and the importance of respect. Pupils learn about human rights, the impact of discrimination and the consequences of prejudice, both historically and in contemporary society. Through subjects such as PSHE and the humanities, pupils examine how different groups have been treated and are encouraged to consider the importance of empathy, fairness and inclusion.
43. Teachers promote British values through all areas of school life, but also specifically within curriculum content, class discussion and whole-school events, such as debating the rule of law during PSHE, exploring democracy through pupil elections and celebrating individual liberty and mutual respect through themed assemblies and cultural celebrations. Staff teach pupils about how Parliament works and the principle of democratic representation, including by making use of topical events such as the general election or other democratic events. Pupils contribute to school life through voting, shared decision-making and respectful discussion, demonstrating awareness of their responsibilities as members of a community.
44. Leaders and staff manage transitions thoughtfully to support pupils at key points in their school journey. Teachers use taster days, photo booklets and classroom visits to support those joining the school in the early years and also to help prepare pupils for key entry points into the school, such as Year 3. As pupils transition from the early years into Year 1, a detailed handover process ensures that staff have a clear understanding of each child's needs and early-learning goal achievements, enabling them to provide appropriate and targeted support. Staff also ensure that there is individualised support for pupils joining from overseas, including online interviews, family visits and welcome events. Pupils who join mid-year are paired with buddies to help them settle quickly. Those with responsibility for boarding ensure that new pupils are introduced gradually to routines through buddy systems, welcome events and practical guidance, which supports their emotional security and integration into the school. Staff support pupils who are moving on to senior school with guidance on next steps, visits and preparation activities.
45. Teachers develop pupils' financial awareness and skills through carefully planned opportunities to explore these. For example, in the early years, children learn to recognise coins and use role play to practise spending and to learn what their money can buy them in real-life situations. As they progress, staff use real-life contexts in mathematics and problem-solving to build pupils' understanding of budgeting considerations. Older pupils participate in a financial life-skills programme and engage in enterprise initiatives that develop an understanding of savings, interest rates and responsible spending.

46. Pupils engage in discussions about ethical choices and show increasing maturity in how they reflect on their own behaviour and the impact of their actions on others. Through PSHE, assemblies and form times, pupils consider issues such as fairness, democracy, online safety and environmental responsibility. They develop an age-appropriate understanding of British institutions, public services and the rule of law, including through recent discussions about parliamentary processes and legal responsibilities. Charitable initiatives and local community causes deepen pupils' understanding of inequality and the concept of social justice.
47. Leaders ensure that pupils are well informed about possible future careers through a structured programme embedded in the curriculum. PSHE lessons and a dedicated careers week introduce pupils to a wide range of professions, supported by visiting speakers such as engineers and journalists who share real-world insights. Pupils enhance their economic understanding from an early age through initiatives such as a Year 4 careers project and a financial life skills programme in Year 8. Staff also guide pupils in Years 7 and 8 through an independent project which supports research and presentation skills. Pupils gain confidence in identifying personal interests and linking these to future aspirations.
48. Staff across the school promote social development and responsibility. In the early years, children are encouraged to take on small tasks such as helping at snack time and tidying shared spaces. Teachers use play and collaborative tasks to develop pupils' co-operation and empathy. As pupils move through the school, they have the opportunity to take on leadership roles, including as prefects, house captains and eco-monitors. Prefects are given age-appropriate responsibilities that promote leadership, support school routines and contribute positively to the wider community. Pupils lead charity fundraising, organise events and contribute ideas to improve the school. In boarding, older pupils take responsibility for helping younger boarders, acting as positive role models and fostering co-operation. Staff guide pupils to understand the expectations and responsibilities of these roles and support them to lead by example.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

- 49. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Safeguarding

50. Leaders ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures meet current statutory requirements. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities meet regularly to review cases, respond to concerns and discuss contextual safeguarding risks. They work with external agencies to ensure that support for pupils is timely and effective.
51. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements through scheduled meetings with the safeguarding team, visits to the school and regular review of safeguarding policies, training records, reports from leaders and the SCR.
52. Staff receive training in line with current statutory guidance. Induction training includes all required content and additional guidance to ensure that staff understand the school's whistleblowing procedures. As a result, staff understand how to identify, record and report safeguarding concerns, including low-level concerns about adults and child-on-child abuse. Annual training is reinforced through scenario-based questions and follow-up surveys.
53. Leaders implement appropriate safer recruitment procedures methodically. They complete all required pre-employment checks before any adults commence working at the school, including the verification of references. The SCR is accurately maintained.
54. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through PSHE, computing and assemblies. A filtering and monitoring system alerts the safeguarding team to any potential breaches and access levels are adapted for pupils, staff and guests as needed. Pupils know who to speak to if they are worried and access support through worry boxes, trusted staff and the independent person.
55. Boarding staff complete safeguarding training relevant to their roles and understand how to supervise and support pupils during evenings and weekends. Expectations for visitors and on-site residents are clear. Leaders are alert to boarding-specific safeguarding risks, including isolation and managing online activity. Staff training includes boarding. Boarders report that they know how to access support.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

56. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Northbourne Park School
Department for Education number	886/6004
Registered charity number	280048
Address	Northbourne Park School Betteshanger Deal Kent CT14 0NW
Phone number	01304 611215
Email address	office@northbournepark.com
Website	www.northbournepark.com
Proprietor	Northbourne Park School Ltd
Chair	Mrs Susie Barter
Headteacher	Mr Mark Hammond
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	192
Number of boarding pupils	60
Date of previous inspection	18 to 20 May 2022

Information about the school

57. The school is an independent co-educational day and boarding school, situated in Betteshanger, Deal. The school is a charitable company limited by guarantee, whose trustees provide governance. The pre-prep department comprises the early years and Years 1 and 2. The preparatory section of the school includes Years 3 to 8 alongside two bilingual classes, Sixième and Cinquième, which are taught by French staff in mathematics, French, history and geography, following the French national curriculum. All other academic work for all pupils is taught in English. The current headteacher took up post in September 2023. The current chair of governors joined the board in 2017 and became chair in September 2022.
58. The school has two single-sex boarding houses and offers full, weekly and flexible boarding for pupils in Years 3 to 8.
59. There are 38 children in the early years comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
60. The school has identified 42 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
61. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for 58 pupils.
62. The school aims to inspire in every child the confidence to succeed. It aims to develop ambitious, creative and free-thinking learners whilst building leadership and independence within a diverse and internationally minded community. The school seeks to develop in pupils the school values of respect, tolerance, kindness, loyalty, love and courage so that they are able to explore and measure risk in a nurturing environment.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

29 April to 1 Ma 2025

63. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

64. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

65. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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For more information, please visit isi.net