



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Advice Note for a Material Change Visit

Cobham Hall School

February 2022

School's details

School	Cobham Hall School			
DfE number	886/6044			
Registered charity number	1064758			
Address	Cobham Hall School Brewers Road Cobham Kent DA12 3BL			
Telephone number	01474 823371			
Email address	enquiries@cobhamhall.com			
Headmistress	Mrs Wendy Barrett			
Chair of governors	Mr Elliot Lipton			
Age range	11 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	135			
	Day pupils	96	Boarders	39
	Seniors	110	Sixth Form	25
Date of visit	22 February 2022			

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 Cobham Hall is an independent day and boarding school for female pupils. It is a registered charity and part of the Mill Hill Foundation, overseen by a governing body who are also the trustees. The school has identified 30 pupils as having special educational needs and /or disabilities (SEND). Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 11 pupils. The school's previous inspection was a focused compliance and educational quality inspection in September 2021.
- 1.2 This was an announced material change visit at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to assess the school's proposal to introduce male pupils into the sixth form including as boarders, and to increase its registered age range from 11 to 18 to 11 to 19 years. The visit focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs), and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding 2015.

Regulations which were the focus of the visit	Team judgements
Part 2, paragraph 5 (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development)	Met
Part 3, paragraphs 7 (safeguarding) and 8 (safeguarding of boarders); NMS 11	Met
Part 3, paragraphs 9 (behaviour) and 10 (bullying); NMS 12	Met
Part 3, paragraphs 11 (health and safety); NMS 6	Met
Part 3, paragraph 12 (fire safety); NMS 7	Met
Part 3, paragraph 13; (first aid) NMS 3	Met
Part 3, paragraph 14; (supervision of pupils); NMS 15	Met
Part 3, paragraph 15; (admission and attendance registers)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment); NMS 6	Met
Part 4, paragraphs 18 to 21 (recruitment of staff, supply staff and proprietors); NMS 14	Met
Part 5, paragraphs 23–30 (premises and accommodation); NMS 5	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
Part 8 paragraph 34 (leadership and management); NMS 13	Met
NMS 8 (provision and preparation of food and drinks) and 9 (boarders' possessions)	Met

2. Inspection findings

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [ISSR Part 2, paragraph 5]

- 2.1 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the proposed introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years.
- 2.2 Scrutiny of the school's documentation confirms that principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. In discussions staff spoke of the respectful manner in which pupils converse with each other and with adults, indicating the good quality of relationships within the school. Staff also confirmed that pupils exhibit an acceptance of the views and beliefs of others, both within the school community and the wider world. Suitable provision is made to educate pupils to respect those with protected characteristics, including in relation to gender.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 11]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.3 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.4 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.5 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years.
- 2.6 Safeguarding procedures are suitably implemented in line with *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2021*. Additional arrangements to ensure the welfare of the pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic have been continually updated in line with government advice. Regular meetings indicate that the safeguarding team works closely together to promote pupils' well-being. They ensure that safeguarding information is regularly shared with staff, parents and pupils and that procedures are monitored. In discussions, pupils reported that there are many opportunities to raise any concerns and that they feel they are listened to by staff when they do so. Inspection evidence from safeguarding records confirms this view and that action is taken when pupils' specific needs are identified. Whilst there have been no incidents of sexual harassment or sexual violence, including online, since the previous inspection, it is clear that senior leaders and staff understand how they should be dealt with. This includes seeking external advice if necessary. Members of staff are clear about whether pupils are respectively in need or at risk, and understand that if any pupils are victims of harmful sexual behaviour or potentially so, safeguarding partners and the police should be contacted promptly.
- 2.7 Detailed school records of all safeguarding concerns are regularly monitored to identify patterns so that any early signs of abuse can be acted upon. Regular safeguarding training for all staff includes identification of such behaviours. In discussions staff demonstrated a full awareness of their training and their safeguarding responsibilities. They confirmed that they would know how to respond if a situation of child-on-child sexual abuse arose. Staff receive suitable training when new to the school and, from thereon, update training about the most recent statutory guidance is regularly provided. Staff have completed training in the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Central records of staff attendance at training are kept systematically, so that absentees at the time of training can be identified and training arranged.
- 2.8 Arrangements for handling allegations against staff are included in safeguarding procedures and in discussions, staff showed an appropriate awareness of what may constitute a low-level concern. The

school safeguarding team works together with the governors to produce a suitable annual review of safeguarding. A scrutiny of the minutes of board meetings where safeguarding was discussed confirms an appropriate depth and breadth of oversight. Governors have received effective safeguarding training and the DSL ensures that they receive regular updates. From discussions with governors and staff it is clear that they have given appropriate thought to the proposed intake of male pupils into the sixth form, looking carefully at related safeguarding arrangements and procedures.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – provision and preparation of food and drinks [NMS 8] and boarders' possessions [NMS 9]

- 2.9 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form, including in boarding.
- 2.10 The school ensures that boarders are provided with sufficient food which is adequate in nutrition, quality, choice and variety. In addition to main meals, boarders have access to drinking water and they are able to prepare snacks hygienically at reasonable times. The school is sensitive to boarders' dietary requirements. Laundry arrangements for boarders are effective and facilities for safe storage of their belongings are in place. Organised shopping trips enable boarders to purchase necessary personal items.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – behaviour and bullying [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 9 and 10; NMS 12]

- 2.11 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years, including in boarding.
- 2.12 The school's approach to promoting good behaviour is effective, as evidenced through the scrutiny of systematic records and direct observation of pupils' behaviour around the school. Pupils were courteous, conducting themselves in a responsible manner. In discussions they reported that there is a culture of kindness throughout the school where harassment and abuse are not tolerated. Suitable thought has been given to ensuring that guidance for pupils on appropriate behaviour recognises the need for respect for those with protected characteristic, including gender.
- 2.13 Effective measures are in place to guard against bullying both in day and boarding time. The school's policy includes comprehensive definitions of bullying and is supported by separate procedures aimed at preventing cyber-bullying. The policy provides for educating pupils about bullying through assemblies and well-being lessons. Central recording is effective and records shows that suitable steps are taken to deal with any bullying that occurs.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – health and safety and fire safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 11 and 12; NMS 6 and 7]

- 2.14 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years.
- 2.15 Health and safety measures within the school are implemented appropriately. Systematic procedures and outcomes are regularly reviewed by governors. An appropriate fire safety policy is in place. Procedures for emergency evacuation are implemented effectively and suitably recorded. Regular fire drills are held both in the day and during boarding time. Suitable fire risk assessments for all school buildings have been undertaken with any recommended actions being swiftly addressed. Fire signage is clear throughout and all members of staff have been trained to manage any emergency evacuation.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – first aid [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 13; NMS 3]

- 2.16 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years, including in boarding.
- 2.17 The school ensures that the physical and mental health, and emotional well-being of all pupils is promoted and suitable medical procedures are in place. Members of staff are appropriately trained in first aid. Medication is safely and securely stored and proper records are kept of its administration. Overnight care of boarders who are ill currently takes place in suitable accommodation in boarding houses. A dedicated sick bay for male boarders, suitably segregated from other provision, is due to be completed before September 2022.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – supervision of pupils [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 14; NMS 15]

- 2.18 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years, including in boarding.
- 2.19 The school ensures that pupils are always under appropriate supervision while attending school. There are sufficient members of staff in place to maintain suitable supervision in both day and boarding time, including once male pupils join the school. Boarders are at all times under the responsibility of an identified member of staff who is suitably qualified and experienced and proposed arrangements in segregated areas for male boarders are appropriate.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – admission and attendance registers [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 15]

- 2.20 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years.
- 2.21 The admission and attendance registers are maintained appropriately. The school operates effective systems to store the information.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16; NMS 6]

- 2.22 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years.
- 2.23 The school has an appropriate risk assessment policy which sets out a suitable approach to the management of risk including the action taken to reduce any risks that are identified. Risk assessments are in place for all visits and areas of the school such as for the science laboratory, boarding houses and recreation areas. Suitable assessments of risk have been made for the proposed material change.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18–21; NMS 14]

- 2.24 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years.
- 2.25 The school implements a suitable recruitment policy which has due regard to the procedures outlined in KCSIE. The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required. The information on the register reflects documentation seen in staff files. All persons visiting boarding accommodation are kept under sufficient staff supervision to prevent them gaining unsupervised access to the boarders.

Premises and accommodation, including boarding accommodation [ISSR Part 5, paragraphs 23–30; NMS 5]

- 2.26 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years, including in boarding.
- 2.27 The current site provides appropriate provision for additional pupils. Building works are underway to provide a new sixth-form centre for socialising and study. Appropriate boarding facilities for both female and male pupils, suitably segregated, are already in place but these are currently being refurbished to include new showers, washbasins and toilets. There are suitable plans to ensure sufficient toilets in teaching areas, and showering facilities and changing rooms for sport for pupils of different gender. Dining arrangements have been appropriately considered and there is sufficient space for outdoor activities and recreation. Effective provision is in place for pupils to have easy access to drinking water. Throughout the school furnishings and resources are of a suitable quality. Appropriate medical facilities are in place and acoustics effectively promote learning. The site is maintained in a suitable state of repair and regularly monitored for safety with any maintenance issues being promptly addressed. External lighting ensures all areas are appropriately lit.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

- 2.28 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 13]

- 2.29 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so with the introduction of male pupils into the sixth form and an increase in age range to 11 to 19 years, including in boarding.
- 2.30 Those with leadership and management positions demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role. They fulfil their responsibilities effectively and provide clear support for the boarding experience. Governors and the senior leaders have considered carefully what measures are necessary to introduce male pupils into the sixth form, including in boarding, and the school is suitably prepared for the material change.

3. Recommendation with regard to material change request

- 3.1 It is recommended that the school is granted permission to make its sixth form co-educational from September 2022, including in boarding, and to increase its registered age range from 11–18 to 11–19.

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 The inspector held discussions with the head, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with the chair of governors. She visited different areas of the school including boarding areas, and talked with groups of pupils. She scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.