



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

BOLTON SCHOOL BOYS' DIVISION

DECEMBER 2016



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Bolton School Boys' Division			
DfE number	350/6014			
Registered charity number	526618			
Address	Bolton School Boys' Division Chorley New Road Bolton Lancashire BL1 4PA			
Telephone number	01204 840201			
Email address	seniorboys@boltonschool.org			
Headmaster	Mr Philip Britton MBE			
Chairman of governors	Mr Michael Griffiths			
Age range	7 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll	1109			
	Boys	1109	Girls	0
	Day pupils	1109	Juniors	206
	Seniors	684	Sixth Form	219
Inspection dates	07 to 08 December 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 an assembly. Inspectors visited the senior and junior schools, and the facilities for the sixth form 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

Mr Stephen Cole	Reporting inspector
Mr James Burns	Team inspector (Assistant head, HMC school)
Mrs Lynda Corry	Team inspector (Senior teacher, GSA school)
Mr Paul Cozens	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr David Fotheringham	Team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)
Mr Colin Haddon	Team inspector (Deputy head, ISA school)
Mr Jay Piggot	Team inspector (Head, HMC school)
Mr Clive Thorpe	Team inspector (Assistant head, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Bolton School Boys' Division is an independent day school for boys aged between 7 and 18 years. The school is one of the oldest schools in Lancashire; its origins can be traced back to at least 1516, as the Bolton Grammar School for Boys in the town centre. In 1913 the first Viscount Leverhulme offered a generous endowment on condition that the Bolton Grammar School for Boys and the Bolton High School for Girls become equal partners in Bolton School (Boys' and Girls' Divisions). In 1915, the Bolton School Foundation formally came into existence. The Foundation has a single governing body, currently comprising 19 governors who are drawn from local industry and business, and the educational world. The junior school works within the auspice of the Boys' Division. It has a headmistress who reports to the headmaster of the senior school, but the junior school has autonomy to create a distinctive unit within the whole school.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection the school has constructed shared sixth form teaching, study, social, and information and communication technology (ICT) facilities in the Riley Centre. In the Summer of 2014, the Foundation purchased Patterdale Hall, an outdoor pursuit centre on the shore of Lake Ullswater in the Lake District. An e-learning project has been introduced and all pupils work on tablet devices in class. The school has also introduced a formalised pastoral curriculum.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to realise the potential of each pupil by providing challenge, encouraging and promoting teamwork, and developing leadership capabilities. It aspires for its pupils to leave as self-confident young people with the knowledge, skills and attributes to allow them to lead a happy and fulfilled life, and make a difference for good in the wider community.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a wide geographical catchment area, and about a third are from various minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 1.5 The results of standardised testing demonstrate that the ability profile of the school is above the national average. Almost two thirds of pupils have above average ability, with a further third displaying well above average ability. The school defines more able pupils as those who have the ability to achieve at a level significantly higher than their peer group, and tailors work for their needs. The number of pupils requiring support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is seventy-two. They require support for a variety of conditions, the most common of which is dyslexia. One has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Pupils speak over thirty languages other than English at home. Five pupils require support with English as an additional language (EAL).

Recommendation from previous inspection

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an integrated inspection in November 2010. The recommendation from that inspection was:
- Ensure that the overall high quality of teaching is consistent across all age groups.
- 1.7 The school has fully met the recommendation of the previous inspection.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Almost all pupils have highly positive attitudes to study for their age.
- Pupils possess strong numeracy and outstanding communication skills.
- The increasingly sophisticated study skills that pupils develop as they move through the school underpin the very good progress made by the vast majority.
- Pupils have a strong record of national representation in a variety of sports.

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

- Pupils have a strong, shared and well-understood moral code which transcends their different faiths.
- They are determined, resilient, adaptable and loyal to their school.
- They are highly supportive of each other, and their behaviour is usually outstanding.
- Pupils make a strong contribution to their local community.

Recommendations

2.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, it is suggested that:

- The school should continue to develop its new pastoral curriculum, with a particular focus on the attitudes both in and out of class of a small number of pupils who make the least progress.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils have outstanding attitudes to learning for their age and have unusually strong basic skills. In the junior school and younger years of the senior school, the emphasis of teaching in all subjects is on developing pupils' confidence to apply their basic skills of numeracy, language and the use of technology. As a result, pupils have the secure foundations from which to make rapid progress and are studying work ahead of the expectations for their age by the end of Year 7. They use advanced grammar with accuracy in both modern foreign and classical languages, and consequently many are highly successful in external competitions.
- 3.3 Pupils develop strong mathematical skills from an early age. In the junior school, the mastery of multiplication tables is reinforced at every opportunity. Pupils' mathematical ability is advanced for their age in both the senior and junior school. Pupils are highly numerate, and apply this knowledge creatively. In 2016, pupils were awarded over 20 gold medals in national mathematics challenges at various ages. They apply mathematical strategies without second thought. Hence, junior school pupils were quick to understand counting in Mandarin, and sixth formers faultlessly absorbed a challenging concept in an economics lesson.
- 3.4 Pupils are highly articulate. They explain clearly, reason logically and have a mature command of technical vocabulary. Pupils are confident in speaking to larger audiences whether in class or assemblies. In interview, pupils related that they are well supported in overcoming any shyness by the support they are provided in class and in public speaking competitions. Senior school pupils' listening skills are acute. Even allowing for their age, these are less well-developed in the junior school as teachers allow pupils' concentration to waver, especially if the range of task lacks variety or if they speak whilst pupils are using tablet computers.
- 3.5 Reading skills throughout the school are excellent. Pupils can absorb considerable amounts of text and the more able can analyse it critically. After early intervention in the junior school, the quality of reading skills is maintained by a structured reading programme and a well-resourced library. Pupils' writing styles are sophisticated for their age. Arguments are cogently developed and their essay writing contains complex structures. Year 9 pupils were writing in iambic pentameters. Curriculum plans and subject schemes of work emphasise creative writing. In the junior school, the marking scheme successfully supports the accurate use of advanced technical vocabulary.
- 3.6 Pupils display insightful and dextrous technological skills, reinforced by their use of tablet computers in many lessons. Teaching is carefully planned to ensure that pupils use their individual tablets whenever it will enhance their progress. Their use is embedded to the extent that doing so in lessons seems totally natural. Pupils describe these devices as an aid to learning, 'like a pencil or ruler' rather than as a novelty. In interview, all pupils but particularly those with SEND were unequivocal that these tablets support them in organising work, revision and supporting their progress. Pupils use technology imaginatively. In the school's '365 Club' pupils created art to reflect their own feelings. Sixth formers used advanced electronic software to provide an inventive and original soundtrack for the school's recent production of *Dr Faustus*.

- 3.7 Pupils have sophisticated study skills for their age. Pupils ask 'why?' from an early age: in the junior school, such as not 'who won the Battle of Hastings?' but 'why did William win the Battle of Hastings?'. Teaching styles which deliberately invite challenge encourage pupils' inquisitive approach. Pupils enjoy problem solving, and relish the opportunities for decoding and the 'Enigma' clubs. They can work independently and research across a range of subjects, supported in this by the teaching of basic skills. Older pupils can take accurate independent notes in lessons. Pupils are skilful at making deductions from a synthesis of previous learning; junior school pupils used their knowledge of characteristics of mammals (have hair), amphibians (living in and out of water) and fish to accurately deduce to which groups a jellyfish and worm belong.
- 3.8 Pupils are not afraid to be wrong, and are prepared to conject. They enjoy academic sparring, and appreciate mental challenge. Pupils develop higher-order approaches and also exemplify the less-appreciated virtues of concentration, focus, and hard work. Teachers are not reticent at emphasising that these attitudes are key to academic progress. The increasingly sophisticated study skills of pupils underpin the very good progress made by the vast majority. They make progress that is good overall in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. Where comparisons can be made, the progress of pupils is more rapid than those of the same gender and ethnicity nationally. Pupils with SEND usually make progress that is stronger than that of other pupils. The school's formal tracking procedures have identified a very small minority in each year group who do not make progress in line with the majority, and without whom the overall progress is rapid. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, the vast majority of pupils stated that the school provides them with the opportunity to learn and make good progress. Results at both GCSE and A level in the years 2012 to 2015 are above and on occasion well above the national average.
- 3.9 The recent introduction of baseline assessments in the junior school has allowed teachers to set aspirational targets, to which pupils are responding. In the junior school a majority achieve at a higher level than is projected for their ability. Many younger pupils enter the school with the ability to speak English fluently, but with relatively weak skills in reading and spelling. The introduction of intervention groups has resulted in pupils making considerable progress in their reading and spelling during their time in the junior school, including those pupils with EAL. Pupils' artistic skills are exceptional and develop quickly, particularly in the junior school. Paintings by Year 6 pupils demonstrated mature construction and use of vivid colour. Throughout the school, the emphasis on accomplishing basic skills ensures that pupils have the confidence to experiment creatively.
- 3.10 Pupils achieve at an exceptional standard in sport. A recent leaver is opening the batting for the England cricket team. Seven pupils represent Great Britain for their age group at water polo, and one pupil does so in chess. School teams are the United Kingdom water polo champions in three age groups. Pupils are motivated by the direct interest of the senior leadership and governors in their sporting achievements, and exemplify without exception the school's ethos of participation and excellence in sport. In their questionnaire responses, the vast majority of parents stated that the school provides a good choice of extra-curricular activities. In interview, pupils spoke enthusiastically about the range of sporting, musical and drama opportunities. Standards in music and the performing arts are good, and many pupils enjoying learning musical instruments and taking part in school productions.

- 3.11 Since the previous inspection the governors have secured ownership of Patterdale Hall, the school's outward bound centre in the Lake District. The centre is visited by most year groups, and every pupil in the school undertakes their Duke of Edinburgh's scheme bronze award during Year 10. In interview, pupils said that during the visits there they had learnt skills of collaboration, engagement, initiative and independence, and argued that these transferred into their approaches in class. They are unafraid to accept risk, to be academically adventurous, or to take on challenges.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 The pupils' strong personal development is guided and enhanced by the school's pastoral curriculum. Leadership and management have researched the needs of boys in the next decade, and hence have ensured that pastoral time is effective in supporting pupils. The curriculum ensures a coherent message within assemblies, tutor periods, and personal health and social education (PHSE) lessons, and consistent approaches to any academic or the rare behavioural issues. Pupils have a strong, shared and well-understood moral code that transcends different faiths. They are determined, resilient, adaptable and loyal to their school. Pupils are highly supportive of each other.
- 4.3 Pupils understand that developing a self-critical approach supports their academic and personal development. In art lessons and in an English essay society they were unafraid to criticise, and accepting of criticism themselves. Pupils can defend their opinions, but also demonstrate the flexibility to amend their views. From the junior school, they are weaned on to an 'even better if' approach to work. For example, they self-refer themselves to subject clinics if they do not understand work. Senior school pupils deepen their self-knowledge through the introduction of character cards, which focus on the core attributes of an excellent character. These cards are at an early stage but have enabled pupils to confront and work to improve their perceived weaker character areas. Throughout the school, whether in reminding younger pupils to bring tablets or encouraging senior pupils to undertake adventurous outdoor activity safely, teachers prefer pupils to learn from their mistakes rather than intervene.
- 4.4 Pupils understand that the extent of their own effort is a significant factor in the level of achievement. Junior school pupils display initiative in class as many teachers allow pupils to steer their own learning. Hence, pupils with SEND have good organisational skills by the time they reach their public examination years. At a higher level, pupils are aware of their responsibilities and know that the healthy lifestyle decisions they make have consequences for their future well-being. In its turn, the school has clear expectations and a stepped and proportionate response to any issues. At a lower level, pupils feel enfranchised; they value the choices they have and the structure in which they make them, but also respect the lack of compulsion. Teachers provide a transparent structure for behaviour which is focused on core academic skills, and they channel rather than enforce natural progress in both personal development and academic achievement.
- 4.5 Pupils display strong perseverance if challenged by difficult work in class or activities around the school. They are not needy, and do not immediately seek unnecessary help. Pupils' perseverance and adaptability is developed in more physically challenging environments during their visits to Patterdale Hall. This centre provides an ideal environment in which pupils can hone their character. Feedback from visits demonstrates that pupils identify numerous positive outcomes, including the building of appreciation for others' strengths and weaknesses. In interview, Year 7 pupils said that teamwork helped everybody in the year, and those in Year 13 expressed that collaboration was a significant factor in the school's success. This is evident in English and in drama, where the need to empathise and occupy different roles was scripted into the lesson planning. The governors support this collaborative approach in their review of personal development needs. The Riley Centre provides co-educational study and social areas for the sixth form, and is a manifestation of their support. Pupils learn to work naturally alongside each other in preparation for higher education.

- 4.6 Many pupils develop their spiritual understanding through worship outside school. Worship for all faiths is strongly supported by the leadership of the school, and exemplified in its work with the Bolton Council of Mosques. In their questionnaire responses, almost all parents agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. The curriculum ensures that pupils assimilate religious concepts at an early stage. A notably high-quality and well-informed debate was observed in a religious studies class. Pupils appreciate, remember and ponder messages from assembly. They display no reluctance to talk about matters of faith, and enjoy contemplation of non-material aspects of life. In their questionnaire responses, a small minority of pupils felt that teachers do not always provide a balanced political view. However, inspection evidence gained from interviews found this view to be traced to heightened debates following the European Union referendum and United States elections. Teaching and pastoral approaches encourage an ethos of tolerance without complacency. Junior pupils are mentored by senior pupils in English, modern foreign languages and sport. Senior pupils in the water polo team have key roles in supporting newer members in the pressured environment of national competitions.
- 4.7 Pupils accept increasing responsibility as they move through the school, and are keen to represent each other on pupil councils. In interview, pupils expressed that the school is special and that they share a common goal of ensuring that it remains so. The behaviour of pupils around the school is usually impeccable. Almost all parents in their questionnaire responses agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Pupils are well supervised, but also encouraged to self-regulate their behaviour. The sixth form has developed the school mantra of 'banter is fun, bullying is harmful'; teachers encourage pupils to recognise the line between banter and bullying by themselves. The school has a strong ethos of inter-personal respect. Staff set a strong example. Pupils actively promote an agreed moral code. Teaching allows and encourages pupils to expound their beliefs; a Year 7 pupil argued the existence of a natural law that governs human approaches to one another. In Year 9, the whole class agreed with a pupil who proposed that moral awareness and values transcend different faiths. Senior pupils openly and intelligently discuss gender issues. Pupils demonstrate strong respect for those from other ethnic backgrounds and cultures. They work well alongside each other both in and outside of class, with an absence of any racial or cultural cliques. The governance and leadership of the school are widely involved in the town and wider community, and aware of its needs.
- 4.8 Pupils express an affinity to the concept of loyalty to their school and their town, trumping loyalty to faith or culture. Pupils are secure, confident and measured in assessing risk, underpinned by their visits to Patterdale Hall. Senior school pupils express sensible approaches to mental health problems and issues, supported by the school's 'SPACE' programme which links PHSE and other key life skills. Junior school pupils display an early awareness of risks to health during their activities in the science curriculum.

- 4.9 The school enjoys a distinguished record of community work. Pupils have recently won a national award for the cumulative hours spent volunteering. In interview, they were keen to emphasise more the innate value of the work to the area, and to their own development. The 'Shine' project for disadvantaged children is a beacon, but the projects vary in type and are widespread geographically in the area. It is a school expectation that all pupils should spend a minimum number of hours undertaking voluntary work, but many surpass it. By the time they leave school, pupils are adaptable, resilient and flexible. They are mature, emotionally and academically developed young men, with strong personal skills, and a self-confidence cloaked in modesty. They have rich experience of living and learning with those from cultures other than their own, and have a well-developed insight into faiths and other non-material aspects of life.