



**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**DOWNSIDE SCHOOL**

**BOARDING WELFARE**

**INTERMEDIATE INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Downside School

Full Name of School	<b>Downside School</b>
DfE Number	<b>933/6021</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>1158507</b>
Address	<b>Downside School Stratton-on-the-Fosse Radstock Somerset BA3 4RJ</b>
Telephone Number	<b>01761 235100</b>
Fax Number	<b>01761 235105</b>
Email Address	<b>hmsec@downside.co.uk</b>
Head Master	<b>Dr James Whitehead</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Dom Leo Maidlow Davis</b>
Age Range	<b>11 to 18</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>348</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (208 boys; 140 girls)</b>
Number of Day Pupils	Total: <b>62</b>
Number of Boarders	Total: <b>286</b> Full: <b>286</b> Weekly: <b>0</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>17 Nov 2015 to 19 Nov 2015</b>

## PREFACE

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, as amended. This inspection focuses on the school's compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection.

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule* for intermediate inspections, focusing primarily on compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (NMS). The inspection occurs over a period of two and a half continuous days in the school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit;
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features;
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures;
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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 their judgement.

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

The inspectors conducted formal interviews with boarders, held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors and other governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended registration sessions. Inspectors visited each of the boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and boarding pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mrs Elaine Brook	Reporting Inspector
Mr Nick Brown	Team Inspector for Boarding (Pastoral Deputy Head, HMC school)
Mrs Elizabeth Hewer	Team Inspector for Boarding (Pastoral Deputy Head, GSA/HMC school)

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Located in Stratton-on-the-Fosse, to the south of Bath in Somerset, Downside School is a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged from 11 to 18. It was founded in Douai, France in 1606, by the Benedictine community and relocated to its present site of 500 acres in 1814. It has a Roman Catholic foundation, with the Rule of St Benedict guiding its core values. The majority of the pupils are baptised Catholics although the school welcomes members of other faiths and those with none. Originally educating boys, the school became fully co-educational in 2006.
- 1.2 The school forms part of Downside Abbey General Trust and is attached to the monastery. All trustees are monks appointed by the community. A board of governors has been appointed, and since the previous inspection, a new instrument of governance is in place. Twelve members, nine being lay professionals and three being monks, form the governing body and have responsibility for the direction and management of the school. The prior administrator of the monastery is also the chair of the governing body and was the previous head master. The present head master, appointed in 2013, is the first lay head in the school's history and has day-to-day responsibility for the school, supported by a leadership team of senior staff.
- 1.3 The school aims to guide pupils and staff to encounter Christ through experience of a Benedictine community of faith. It aspires to excellence in all areas, and seeks to develop the character and confidence of its pupils through a culture of love, integrity, humility and leadership through service.
- 1.4 There are 348 pupils on roll: 140 girls and 208 boys. Of these, 286 are boarders, comprising 114 girls and 172 boys. Boarders are accommodated in six boarding houses, two for girls and four for boys, each located on the main site. Boarders come from professional and business families. Just over half are of white British origin. Those boarders who originate from overseas come from a wide range of countries, which include Europe, China and South America. Day pupils mostly live within a 25-mile radius of the school. The school has identified 65 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, of whom 31 receive additional support. One pupil has an education, health and care plan. There are 125 pupils who have English as an additional language, of whom 21 receive language support.
- 1.5 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its NC equivalence are shown in the following table.

School	NC name
First Form	Year 7
Second Form	Year 8
Third Form	Year 9
Fourth Form	Year 10
Fifth Form	Year 11
Lower Sixth Form	Year 12
Upper Sixth Form	Year 13

## **2. SUMMARY**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

2.1 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015.

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

2.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Extend practice to allow pupils to express concerns anonymously as well as through the various councils.
2. Ensure that rewards are consistent across all houses and are meaningful to boarders.
3. Address concerns expressed by some boarders about portion availability during mealtimes.

### **(iii) Progress since the previous inspection**

2.3 The previous boarding welfare inspection was undertaken by ISI in November 2012 as part of an integrated inspection. The school met all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011. In full response to the recommendations related to boarding, the school has identified the professional development needs of staff at all levels through the appraisal process and offered appropriate training opportunities, and a rolling programme to improve the environment within some boarding houses is taking place.

### **3. COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS**

#### **3.(a) Boarding provision and care**

- 3.1 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.2 Comprehensive induction material and guidance are provided for new boarders, who are well supported by house staff and by experienced boarders who act as 'buddies'. Boarders confirm that there is a range of people they could talk to if they have a concern. Contact details are clearly displayed on house notice boards for various helplines, including the Children's Commissioner, the school counsellor and the independent listener. [NMS 2]
- 3.3 Boarders who are unwell are appropriately cared for in the school's medical facility, which provides separate accommodation for male and female boarders. A wide range of appropriate policies is implemented effectively and consistently to ensure that the physical and mental health and emotional well-being of boarders are promoted. All medical staff are appropriately qualified and sufficient in number so that the medical centre remains open at all times. Boarders have access to a range of additional medical support that includes medical, dental, optometric and other services as necessary. The storage and dispensing of medicines are managed carefully, and those pupils deemed competent are allowed to self-medicate. The confidentiality and rights of boarders are appropriately respected. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire and in discussions, the vast majority of boarders agreed that their medical needs are met. [NMS 3]
- 3.4 Boarders confirm that they can contact their families electronically or by mobile telephone. In discussions they expressed appreciation of the improved internet access, and a house telephone is also provided to facilitate easy communication. Appropriate systems are in place to monitor the use of electronic communications in order to prevent unsafe practice. Boarders receive regular training in e-safety. [NMS 4]
- 3.5 Boarding accommodation is comfortable and well appointed, although standards vary from house to house. Plans to refurbish houses on a rolling programme are well advanced. Accommodation in all houses is appropriate for the ages and numbers of boarders, and provides separate facilities for boys and girls. Bedrooms for younger boarders have multiple occupancy, whilst older boarders have single rooms, a few of which are en-suite. All boarders are able to study in their rooms and in most houses there are alternative areas in which they can work. Houses have several areas in which boarders can relax. Toilet and washing facilities are reasonably accessible from sleeping accommodation and provide appropriate privacy. All houses are well lit, warm and clean, with furnishings that are appropriate to the age of the individual boarders. Boarders are able to personalise their surroundings. Comprehensive risk assessments are undertaken to reduce any identified hazards. Visitors to boarding houses are always accompanied, and there is no use of school facilities by any outside groups during term time. Surveillance cameras are used discreetly to aid security arrangements. [NMS 5]
- 3.6 All boarders, including those with special dietary, medical or religious needs, are provided with meals that are healthy, nutritious and varied. Meals are prepared in spacious surroundings and provided in a newly refurbished servery. In their responses to the questionnaire, a minority of boarders expressed dissatisfaction with the food and with the provision of snacks. In conversations with boarders both



formally and informally, there was general agreement that the food has improved and that they appreciate the opportunity to make requests through the school council, which meets fortnightly with senior representatives from the catering staff. They stated that initial portions of the main hot meal are insufficient for some, although they understand that they have free access to food such as soup, pasta or salad. Evidence from direct observation, as well as conversations with catering staff and boarders, demonstrated that additional portions of the main course are generally offered only when all boarders have been served once. This means that boarders often have to wait for some time before receiving a second portion, although it is always available at this point. Inspection found no evidence of limited availability of snacks. Boarders are provided with appropriate snacks at reasonable times during the day. They are able to make their own snacks in the evening, when they also have access to a café, which offers a wide choice of prepared hot and cold snacks. Each house has the facility for boarders to cook meals and snacks independently. Drinking water is readily available. [NMS 8]

- 3.7 Adequate laundry arrangements are in place for boarders' clothing and bedding. Boarders are able to purchase stationery, toiletries and other necessities from the school shop and can also source items from nearby local shops, following sensible guidelines for their own safety. Bedrooms have secure storage facilities for boarders' personal items. Appropriate protocols are in place and understood by staff, should they need to carry out a search of boarders' personal belongings. [NMS 9]
- 3.8 An appropriate range and choice of activities are arranged outside teaching time, which includes sufficient free time. In their responses to the questionnaire, a few boarders were unhappy with the provision of activities in the evenings and at weekends. Discussions with boarders and an examination of the programme did not support this view. Boarders are able to visit the nearby village and town at appropriate times, and can engage in activities such as paintballing and scuba diving or use the sports facilities on site. The buildings and grounds provide many areas where boarders can safely be alone if they wish. Boarders have appropriate access to information about the world around them through newspapers, television and the internet. [NMS 10]

### **3.(b) Arrangements for welfare and safeguarding**

- 3.9 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.10 The school has a detailed health and safety policy that is implemented effectively. All relevant checks and routine maintenance systems ensure that the welfare of pupils is not compromised. Any necessary action is reported immediately and remedied. Suitable risk assessments are conducted for all premises, grounds, activities and external trips. [NMS 6]
- 3.11 The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Fire evacuation practices are conducted every half term, including at times when boarders may be expected to be asleep. Meticulous records are kept both centrally and in houses. All personnel and boarders receive regular training so that they understand and comply with procedures. [NMS 7]
- 3.12 The school's arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders are effective. Staff are given appropriate training and receive regular updates in safeguarding information so that they are aware of their responsibilities. The school

holds regular information sessions about a wide variety of issues such as child sexual exploitation, cyber-bullying, and mental health. Senior staff with responsibility for safeguarding have received training in the prevention of radicalisation, and plans to disseminate this information to all staff are in place. Training in safeguarding is a prominent element in the induction programme for all new staff. Detailed records are kept of any safeguarding concerns. The school has good relations with outside bodies over safeguarding concerns; any referrals are made in line with regulatory requirements. The policy and its implementation are formally reviewed each year by governors, who also monitor its effective operation. [NMS 11]

- 3.13 Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to promote good behaviour amongst boarders and are well understood. They include measures to combat bullying, school rules, the use of appropriate restraint, should this be necessary, and arrangements for searching pupils and their possessions. In their responses to the questionnaire, a minority of boarders stated that rewards and sanctions are not administered consistently or fairly. In discussions with boarders, some expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of the rewards available. Senior managers are aware of this because records of rewards and sanctions are now being carefully tracked and confirm some inconsistency of practice. A few boarders expressed concern in response to the questionnaire that bullying is not dealt with effectively. In discussion with boarders, they were clear in their view that bullying, including cyber-bullying, is not tolerated, and reported that any incidents are dealt with swiftly. Examination of records confirmed that policy and practice comply with relevant legislation and guidance. [NMS 12]
- 3.14 The school operates safe recruitment procedures, in line with all current regulatory requirements. Checks of all governors, staff, volunteers and visitors are carried out and recorded on the single central register, where appropriate. Individuals over the age of 16, such as relatives of staff, who live on the same premises as boarders but are not employed by the school are checked through the Disclosure and Barring Service and enter into a written agreement with the school specifying the terms of their accommodation. All visitors to the boarding houses are supervised so that no-one has unauthorised access. The school does not appoint guardians. [NMS 14]

### **3.(c) Leadership and management of the boarding provision**

- 3.15 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.16 A statement of the school's principles and practice is published on the school's website and in documentation. It is made known to boarders and fully implemented. [NMS 1]
- 3.17 The governing body effectively monitors the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision. Governors visit boarding houses and receive regular reports about any issues of concern. The school improvement plan sets out clearly what the school intends to put in place in order to achieve its priorities. This includes the refurbishment of all facilities through a carefully planned programme, thus meeting the recommendation from the previous inspection to improve the environment within some houses. Senior staff provide clear leadership and direction, and manage the day-to-day work of the boarding houses appropriately. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that boarding is well organised and managed effectively. Academic staff work closely with boarding teams so that boarders receive appropriate support and guidance. Senior leaders are experienced in their roles and use their expertise to ensure that boarding

provision and care meet all regulatory requirements. The well-being of pupils is actively promoted. For example, all staff have received training in awareness of teenagers' psychological needs, in eating disorders and in mental health first aid. All the required records are maintained, monitored and amended as necessary. [NMS 13]

- 3.18 All boarding staff have detailed job descriptions and appropriate induction. The annual appraisal system identifies strengths and details area for future development so that staff understand how they can develop their professional expertise. They are then offered appropriate training, thus meeting the recommendation from the previous inspection. The role of any family members resident in the boarding houses is made clear in detailed guidance. Staff supervising boarders outside teaching time are sufficient in number, training and experience so that boarders' welfare and safety are not compromised. Boarders know who is on duty and adhere to the requirement to sign in and out so that their whereabouts are known. Staff are familiar with the policy in relation to boarders going missing and understand what they need to do should this situation arise. There is always one member of staff resident in each house overnight and boarders say that they can easily contact the person on duty should they be unwell. All staff accommodation is completely separate from that of the boarders. Both staff and boarders understand and abide by the protocols for boarders visiting their accommodation. [NMS 15]
- 3.19 A few pupils reported in their responses to the questionnaire that they do not think teachers show concern for them as a person. No evidence was found to support this. Relationships in all houses were observed to be positive and supportive, and sensitive to different needs. In discussions, boarders expressed appreciation for the pastoral care they receive. Boarders from overseas are well integrated in their houses, with no favouritism or discrimination being reported. The overwhelming majority like being at the school and enjoy boarding. [NMS 16]
- 3.20 Boarders are encouraged to contribute their views to the operation of boarding provision informally, to staff or older pupils, through suggestions placed in the catering comments box, or through house councils and the school council. Boarders know that they will not be penalised for expressing concerns or making complaints in good faith. A minority of boarders reported that they feel the school does not ask for and respond to their opinions. Minutes from meetings of the various councils and committees demonstrate that discussions have led to improvements in food provision, sports facilities and weekend activities. Some houses allow for anonymous suggestions to be placed in a box for discussion at house council meetings in order for all boarders to feel free to contribute their views. This practice is valued but is not consistent across all houses. [NMS 17]
- 3.21 An appropriate complaints procedure is available to parents on the school's website. Detailed records are kept of any concerns. No formal complaints were received during the past academic year. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire stated that the school handles concerns well. [NMS 18]
- 3.22 School and house prefects are appointed following a selection process. Prefects are trained, and have clear job descriptions and regular meetings with senior staff to ensure that there can be no abuse of the role. A small minority of boarders indicated in response to the questionnaire that they are not given the chance to take on responsibility. Inspectors found that there is an appropriate variety of ways in which boarders can take on leadership roles, including helping to run their own house and supporting younger boarders. [NMS 19]

3.23 The school does not arrange long-stay lodgings for boarders. [NMS 20]