



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

DEAN CLOSE ST JOHN'S

**BOARDING WELFARE
INTERMEDIATE INSPECTION**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Dean Close St John's

Full Name of School	Dean Close St John's
DfE Number	916/6014
Registered Charity Number	1086829
Address	Dean Close St John's Castleford Hill Tutshill Chepstow Monmouthshire NP16 7LE
Telephone Number	01291 622045
Fax Number	01291 623932
Email Address	info@stjohnsonthehill.co.uk
Head	Mr David Griffiths
Chair of Governors	Mrs Kathryn Carden
Age Range	4 to 13
Total Number of Pupils	186
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (110 boys; 76 girls)
Numbers by Age	4-5 (EYFS): 49 5-11: 94 11-13: 43
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 168
Number of Boarders	Total: 18 Full/Weekly: 9 Flexi: 9
Inspection Dates	15 to 17 Mar 2016

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 a governors' representative, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended registration sessions. Inspectors visited the boarding house 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

Mr Richard Johnson

Reporting Inspector

Mrs Jenny Burrett

Team Inspector for Boarding (Head, IAPS school)

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Dean Close St John's is a co-educational day and boarding preparatory school for pupils aged between four and thirteen years. Founded in 1922, it was originally known as St John's-on-the-Hill School. In July 2015 it became part of the Dean Close Foundation, which is an educational charity overseen by a council of members. This elects from amongst its membership a board of trustees, who undertake the role of governance for all schools within the foundation. There is currently an acting headmaster, who has been in post since July 2015. A substantive appointee is due to take over this position in September 2016. There is also a new head of boarding, who took over in May 2015.
- 1.2 The school occupies a Georgian house, with more recent additions, located on the edge of the town of Chepstow on the English side of the border with Wales. The boarding accommodation is in a detached house within the school grounds. There are specialist teaching facilities for art, music, design, information and communication technology, and sport, including a swimming pool. Recent developments have included new and refurbished sport and catering facilities and redecoration of many buildings. A refurbishment programme for the boarding house has also commenced.
- 1.3 The school seeks to provide a breadth of opportunity and to encourage contribution from its pupils in every aspect of school life. It aims to establish relationships between all staff and pupils which are based on honesty, integrity and mutual respect. In doing so, it aspires to build a sense of resilience and strength in its pupils in a competitive, yet friendly, environment, with the intent that a good sense of fun promotes a happy community.
- 1.4 At the time of the inspection there were 186 pupils on roll: 110 boys and 76 girls. Of these, 49 were in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school offers full, weekly and flexible boarding to pupils from Year 3. There are currently 18 boarders, 9 of whom board flexibly. Thirty pupils have been identified and receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); none of these has a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. Four pupils have English as an additional language (EAL); they do not currently require support for this aspect of their learning. The pupils predominately come from business, farming and professional families and are of white British heritage. Only a few are from overseas, or have a minority ethnic background.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

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. Implement the current plans to complete the refurbishment of facilities in the boarding house, notably the boys' bathroom.
2. Provide additional opportunities for boarding staff to undertake further professional development, particularly sharing good practice with fellow practitioners.

(iii) Progress since the previous inspection

2.3 The previous boarding welfare inspection was undertaken by ISI in November 2012. At that time the school was advised to implement a more formal system for the induction of boarding staff and to review their performance in boarding practice, and also to introduce a more formal system for the monitoring of accidents and medical records by senior staff. The school has met these recommendations.

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 The school has a suitable induction process. New boarders receive an informative booklet, and are supported by a 'buddy'. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, all boarders felt that they have a choice of staff to turn to for personal guidance, and know what to do if they are worried about something. A few boarders raised concerns over the relationships within the house. This was not substantiated by evidence from interviews, and boarders were seen to interact positively. Boarders are aware of the contact numbers for the school's independent listener and other helplines, including the Office of the Children's Commissioner; these are provided on house notice boards. [NMS 2]
- 3.3 The school has an appropriate policy for the care of boarders who are injured or unwell. This is implemented effectively, meeting their physical, mental and emotional needs. All boarding staff have current first-aid training, and are aware of the care required for chronic conditions, procedures for medical emergencies and the protocols to dispense household remedies. There is suitable, separate accommodation for boarders who are sick or injured, and male and female pupils can be separated if necessary. Boarders have suitable access to outside services from specialists, such as dentists and opticians. All medications are securely stored and records of their administration are accurately maintained; prescribed medicines are only given to the intended recipient. Staff are aware of boarders' rights of confidentiality and consent, and boarders may self-medicate only after a suitable assessment. Senior staff monitor medical and accident records effectively, as recommended at the 2012 integrated inspection. [NMS 3]
- 3.4 In their questionnaire responses, a few pupils said that they had difficulty contacting their families. Inspectors looked into the matter and found that boarders have suitable opportunities to maintain contact using a variety of methods. In discussions, all boarders said that they can readily contact their parents using either telephones or electronic devices. The school has suitable procedures to monitor and protect pupils online. [NMS 4]
- 3.5 The boarding house provides separate male and female dormitory accommodation that is well organised, and has suitable space, ventilation, light and heating. Suitable risk assessments are carried out and action is taken to follow up any concerns identified. The house is cleaned daily and adequate warm bedding is provided. Boarders can personalise their accommodation with their own duvets, soft toys and posters. There are male and female bathrooms, which provide adequate toilet and washing facilities. The school is currently undertaking a programme of refurbishment in the boarding house, which has included the girls' bathroom. Work is scheduled for the boys' bathroom, but has yet to be undertaken. The boarding house is secure and visitors are carefully monitored, as are outside groups using other facilities on site. The school's CCTV system does not intrude on boarders' privacy. In response to the questionnaires, all boarders said that they feel safe. [NMS 5]
- 3.6 Boarders are provided with a varied choice of healthy and nutritious meals. Staff are careful to ensure that any specific dietary, medical or religious needs are met. A few concerns were raised in questionnaire responses over the quality of food. Inspectors tasted the food, reviewed menus and interviewed boarders, and found the food to be nutritious, appealing and wholesome. Food is usually prepared in the

main kitchen, which is hygienically maintained and has recently undergone refurbishment. There is also a small, suitably equipped kitchen in the boarding house, which is used by boarders at weekends. All boarders were positive about the drinks and snacks provided at appropriate times in the day and in the evening. Staff are aware of the need to ensure that boarders who may need assistance with eating are enabled to do so with dignity. [NMS 8]

- 3.7 A laundry service is provided and items are returned to the correct boarder. Staff supply any personal items or stationery that boarders require. Secure arrangements are in place for electronic devices and other valuables; all pupils said that their belongings are safe. Staff are aware of the official guidance if they are required to conduct a search of boarders' possessions. [NMS 9]
- 3.8 In questionnaire responses all boarders were happy with the balance of free time and activities in the evenings and at weekends. They can take part in a varied programme of activities, making use of the sports facilities and other recreational areas on site, and also trips to local venues. All these activities are suitably risk assessed. If they wish, boarders can spend time alone. They keep in touch with current affairs through a nightly news programme and have access to newspapers. [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 premises, facilities and accommodation are maintained at a level that, as far as practicable, assures the boarders' health, safety and well-being. The school has suitable health and safety and risk assessment policies, which comply with the relevant guidance and are implemented so that potential hazards are identified and appropriate action is taken. [NMS 6]
- 3.11 The potential risks from fire are managed through suitable risk assessments and the regular servicing and testing of equipment. Exit routes are clear and well signed, and evacuation drills take place during boarding time at least twice each term. [NMS 7]
- 3.12 The arrangements for safeguarding boarders have recently been revised. The new policy meets current requirements and is implemented effectively. All staff have received relevant training, including the designated senior leaders, and are all aware of recent guidance, including the risks associated with radicalisation. New staff undergo a detailed induction process. The school has established effective links with local safeguarding bodies, and refers concerns promptly and appropriately. These arrangements are reviewed termly by the trustees. [NMS 11]
- 3.13 The school ensures good behaviour amongst pupils through the effective implementation of its policies. These include suitable measures to prevent bullying, including cyber-bullying. In interviews, boarders reported that bullying is rare, and the school takes prompt action to address any instances that occur. This was supported by a review of the school's behaviour records, and discussions with staff. The boarding house has its own system of rewards and sanctions; in questionnaire responses all boarders felt that staff treat them fairly. The school has suitable protocols in place for the restraint and searching of pupils and their possessions. [NMS 12]
- 3.14 The school has recently revised its recruitment process. All the required checks take place to ensure the suitability of staff, and these are accurately recorded in the

central register of staff appointments, before staff take up their boarding role. There are currently no spouses and others over 16, not employed by the school, living in the same premises as boarders; the school is aware of the need to conduct the relevant checks should this occur. Visitors are suitably supervised. The school's arrangements for the appointment of guardians are monitored by senior staff through formal home visits and feedback from parents, and the necessary background checks are conducted and recorded. [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 The school's boarding aims and practice are made available in the handbooks for boarders, parents and staff. These accurately reflect current practice. [NMS 1]
- 3.17 A clear management structure is in place for the boarding house. The effectiveness of the boarding arrangements is monitored through frequent visits by senior staff and members of the governing body, who tour the house, share meals and meet informally with the boarders. As a result, they are aware of the need to continue the house refurbishment programme. There are close links between boarding and academic staff, as many teachers undertake evening duties in the house, and boarding staff attend daily staff meetings. This actively promotes boarders' well-being and supports their academic progress and personal development. Boarding standards are met because staff at all levels have appropriate skills and knowledge of the boarding requirements. All required policies and records are maintained and monitored. [NMS 13]
- 3.18 All staff members working in boarding have job descriptions that reflect their responsibilities. In line with the recommendation of the 2012 integrated inspection, all staff are formally appraised in their boarding role, and can attend courses for further training and development. Opportunities are currently limited for sharing good practice with other boarding schools. New staff follow a clear, recorded induction process, which includes shadowing an experienced member of staff. There are currently no spouses or other members of staff households living in the boarding house but suitable protocols to govern their conduct are in place, should this occur. Boarders are always adequately supervised by qualified and experienced staff and know which staff are on duty, including during the night, and how to contact them. Frequent registrations and a clear procedure to sign in and out ensure that staff always know the whereabouts of boarders. Staff understand the procedure for missing boarders, including when the police are contacted. At least two staff sleep overnight in the boarding house in separate accommodation, to which boarders' access is suitably supervised. [NMS 15]
- 3.19 The school's policies and disability access plan outline the steps taken to ensure the promotion of equality and understanding of diversity. No discrimination is evident. Boarders, including those with SEND or EAL, report that they are all individually supported and receive sensitive care. [NMS 16]
- 3.20 Boarders can raise their suggestions and concerns through the boarders' committee, in which all take part. They can identify numerous instances where the school has responded to their requests, including menu choices, evening activities and furnishings in the boarding house. Boarders are not penalised if they raise a concern in good faith. [NMS 17]
- 3.21 The school has revised its complaints policy and procedures, which meet current requirements. A suitable complaints policy for parents is available on the school's

website and the procedures are followed correctly as required. Any complaints which relate specifically to boarding are identified, together with the action taken. [NMS 18]

- 3.22 There are no boarding prefects, but older boarders undertake specific responsibilities within the house. These are understood by all, and younger pupils report that they value the advice and support provided. Staff ensure that there is no abuse of the role. [NMS 19]
- 3.23 The school does not arrange long-stay lodgings for its pupils. [NMS 20]