



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

COPTHILL SCHOOL

MAY 2017



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SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Cophill School			
DfE number	925/6035			
Address	Cophill School Barnack Road Uffington Stamford Lincolnshire PE9 3AD			
Telephone number	01780 757506			
Email address	mail@cophill.com			
Headteacher	Mrs Helen Schofield			
Proprietor	Cophill School Ltd			
Age range	2 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	295			
	Boys	153	Girls	142
	EYFS	72	Years 1 to 6	223
Inspection dates	17 to 18 May 2017			

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 a combined inspection 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 arrangements for grading 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 specifically in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates 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 the national inspectorate, 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, the proprietors and a member of the advisory board, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended an assembly. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, 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 Graham Sims	Reporting inspector
Miss Kaye Lovejoy	Team inspector (Head, ISA school)
Mrs Sally Russell	Team inspector (Head of pre-prep, IAPS school)

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Cophill School began its life as a Nursery school in 1969 and has developed into a co-educational Nursery and preparatory school for day pupils between the ages of 2 and 11. The school is divided into the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children between the ages of 2 and 5, and the main school which caters for pupils in Years 1 to 6. It is owned by Cophill School Ltd, whose board of directors are members of the family that founded and continue to run the school. A small advisory panel carries out many of the functions of a governing body, and works closely with the directors to ensure proper oversight of the school's work.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection the school has constructed a new creative suite which provides facilities for science, technology and drama; a new music room and practice rooms; and an all-weather sports pitch. In September 2016 the headmaster, who is one of the proprietors and managing director of the company, assumed the new role of principal, and the deputy headteacher was promoted to headteacher.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a welcoming, stimulating and happy environment which encourages and motivates every pupil to succeed. It seeks to provide pupils with a broad curriculum designed to develop lifelong knowledge, skills and attitudes that help them to become responsible citizens, independent explorers, creative thinkers, problem solvers, team players and reflective learners. The school places an emphasis on using the outdoor environment to engage and inspire pupils. It seeks to prepare pupils for entrance to a wide range of state and independent senior schools.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of business and professional backgrounds, mostly from White British families living within a 20-mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised test data indicate that the ability of the pupils on entry to the school is broadly average. The school has identified 38 pupils who receive additional support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include moderate and specific learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder, and social, emotional and mental health issues. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care plan; 1 pupil has a statement of special educational needs. English is an additional language for very few pupils; additional support is provided for such pupils if and when required. The school has identified a small minority of pupils as more able or having particular talents which it seeks to develop through its extra-curricular programme, enrichment activities or extension within the normal curriculum.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- In line with one of the school's key aims, pupils develop a wide range of skills and positive learning attributes through the work they undertake outdoors.
- Pupils develop a very wide range of sporting, musical, creative and other skills through the exceptionally broad programme of extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning; they are enthusiastic, curious, versatile, independent and willing to try their hand at new challenges.
- Progress is excellent in some aspects of English and mathematics, and good overall; planning does not always provide sufficient challenge, and written feedback does not always provide sufficient direction for improvement, especially for the more able.

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

- Pupils are self-confident and resilient; they understand what motivates them and are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school through undertaking responsibilities and to the local community through their charity activities and voluntary work.
- Pupils learn how to make important decisions which affect their work and leisure activities, and develop an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and safe.
- The pupils greatly appreciate the natural world, behave extremely well, develop excellent relationships with their peers and teachers, and display sensitivity to others.

Recommendations

2.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Develop the system for tracking pupils' achievement so that it provides a clearer picture of pupils' attainment and of how much progress individuals and groups of pupils actually make.
- Ensure that teachers' curricular planning provides appropriate challenge for all groups of pupils.
- Ensure that all written feedback and marking provide pupils with guidance which will help them to understand how they might improve their work.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 The school's leaders and proprietors have been highly successful in fulfilling the school's aims to motivate pupils to succeed; to enable them to develop lifelong knowledge, skills and attitudes; and to inspire them through use of the outdoor environment to become strong all-rounders. They have also dealt effectively with the recommendations of the previous inspection.
- 3.3 Pupils make excellent progress in some aspects of English and mathematics and good progress overall, reaching standards which are above those expected for pupils of their age. Until 2015, pupils took part in national tests at the end of Year 6, and results were consistently well above the national average. For valid reasons the school has stopped entering pupils for these tests, but the current system for keeping track of pupils' achievement does not provide a sufficiently clear picture of pupils' attainment and the progress of individual or groups of pupils. As a result, teachers' planning follows a middle road as teachers are not always sufficiently clear about what they need to do to provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils.
- 3.4 Pupils of all abilities are very competent readers, and their speaking and listening skills are excellent. They are highly articulate, engage actively in discussions and listen thoughtfully to what others have to say. These skills are encouraged by enthusiastic teachers who allow pupils time to formulate their ideas and engage them in stimulating conversations through the use of open-ended questions. Pupils' written work develops well and examples were observed of pupils producing sensitive and thoughtfully worded creative writing. Opportunities are missed to develop pupils' writing skills to the very highest level as the marking of pupils' work in English and other subjects, whilst often encouraging and pointing out what pupils have done well, is not always critical enough in helping pupils to see how they might improve. A small minority of pupils' pre-inspection questionnaire responses indicated that they do not know how well they are doing in their subjects and a very small minority felt that marking does not help them to improve their work, both views were endorsed to a certain extent by a scrutiny of pupils' books during the inspection.
- 3.5 Pupils make good progress in mathematics and enjoy the subject. The school has been particularly successful in demystifying mathematics for those who have struggled with the subject. Pupils attribute this to the support provided by their teachers, who encourage everyone 'to have a go', develop an attitude of 'maths without fear' and make complicated aspects seem simple. This approach is particularly beneficial for pupils with SEND and those who find learning mathematics difficult, as pupils find encouragement and are motivated to succeed. Pupils apply their skills well in different contexts, particularly when working outdoors. For example the youngest children enjoyed counting out the number of cups needed for snacks, whilst older pupils enjoyed practical tasks such as estimating and measuring the perimeter of the wood. Pupils make excellent progress in developing their information and communication technology (ICT) skills. For example, those in Year 4 were observed putting together stop-motion animation sequences with great skill, whilst others successfully grappled with a coding programme to produce simple game sequences. Pupils have all the necessary skills to present their work using a variety of ICT software when required.

- 3.6 Whilst teachers' planning for academic subjects is largely guided by age-related expectations of the National Curriculum, the planning for pupils' learning outside the classroom is much more ambitious, thus fulfilling one of the school's aims exceptionally well. It is imaginative, challenging and very wide ranging and results in pupils developing into extremely well-rounded, engaged and motivated youngsters whose all-round achievement is excellent. Pupils love the 'work' they do outdoors, and lessons in the woods or out in the open are significant contributory factors which help pupils to develop highly positive attitudes to school and to display such joy and enthusiasm for all they undertake in school. Through their outdoor activities the pupils develop knowledge and natural curiosity, overcome physical challenges and engage enthusiastically in creative and imaginative projects. Children in the EYFS learn important skills through the many opportunities they have to learn outdoors. For example, during the inspection the children reinforced their understanding of how to share food and drink equitably, learnt the importance of planning ahead and appreciated the need for all to play a helping hand as they ventured into the woods for a 'teddy bears' picnic'. In Years 1 to 3, pupils reinforce many aspects of their learning within the classroom as they undertake weekly outdoor learning sessions with specialist staff. Older pupils develop enthusiasm for their learning and deepen their understanding first hand as they undertake outdoor science experiments, geography and history field work, and French and Spanish outdoor cooking sessions.
- 3.7 Pupils' extra-curricular achievements are excellent, largely due to the very wide range of heavily subscribed musical, sporting, creative, outdoor and other activities which take place every day before and after school, and at lunchtime. The school has some 15 different music clubs and over 50 other clubs for pupils of all ages and interests. Many pupils take part in different activities every day and consequently develop a wide range of additional skills and interests over the course of the year. All pupils sing in one of the two main choirs, and all represent the school at least once a term in a sporting activity. Many pupils learn to play a musical instrument. Those with particular musical or sporting talents develop them further through the many specialist activities. Pupils have reached national finals in cross country and the latter stages of competitions in hockey, indoor skiing and gymnastics. Many pupils develop their performance skills through their participation in informal concerts, competitions, assemblies, an annual revue and major drama performances. Others broaden their speaking and drama skills through additional lessons. All pupils enjoy the huge range of extra-curricular and outdoor learning opportunities, and these activities have a particularly positive impact on the progress of pupils with SEND, helping them develop the motivation and will to succeed. They also ensure that the more able pupils have a constant source of new challenges which extend their range of skills and all-round competence.
- 3.8 A further major contributory factor to the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding is the Cophill Challenge scheme which is voluntary but undertaken by almost every pupil in Years 4 to 6. The scheme has a huge impact on pupils' personal development as outlined in the following section, but also makes a major contribution to pupils' overall achievement. Through the scheme, pupils develop an excellent range of skills which have a positive impact on their learning within the classroom. For example they make great strides in learning to be independent, to solve problems on their own or as part of a team, and to be creative. They learn how to tackle new problems and to face challenges which they set for themselves or which may be set for them by their teachers or their parents. With their versatility and highly positive attitudes to learning, it is hardly surprising that the large majority of pupils gain places at their chosen senior schools where standards of entry are high, and that in the last three years the number of music, academic and sporting awards and scholarships gained has averaged double figures.

- 3.9 Parents are extremely pleased with the educational outcomes for their children and the factors which contribute to these. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost every parent felt that the school is enabling their children to make good progress and develop skills for the future, and that the school provides a suitable range of subjects, offers a good choice of extra-curricular activities and meets their children's educational needs effectively. A large majority of the pupils who responded to the questionnaire indicated that the school is helping them to make good progress, that their lessons are interesting and that the teachers are supportive, and all acknowledge the excellent range of activities available to them.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils demonstrate a great deal of self-confidence without arrogance. They have an excellent understanding of what motivates them to learn, but also have the self-discipline and resilience to persevere with work which they find difficult or less intrinsically motivating. Pupils are reflective and know that their attitudes and willingness to work hard are important factors which determine their ability to make good progress and improve their learning. They have a good insight into their own feelings and an ability to express why they might be feeling, happy or sad. The pupils are very clear that their teachers have been influential in helping them to develop their self-understanding and self-esteem. For example, a group of pupils undertaking a booster session for English were proud of improving their understanding and getting correct answers, which was a direct consequence of the support and encouragement of their teacher. The exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular and outdoor activities and particularly the Cophill Challenge play a huge role in developing pupils' confidence, in helping them to get to know themselves, in developing an understanding of their own strengths and areas for development and in ensuring that they are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives. The Challenge has been extremely well thought out and carefully constructed. For example, outside the formal curriculum it requires pupils to participate in at least two public performances which helps build their confidence, it provides opportunities for residential visits which encourages their independence, and it requires them to learn new skills and face personal challenges which help them to develop a sense of achievement and the confidence to try new things.
- 4.3 The pupils become increasingly good at making decisions, whether in relation to their work or the activities and projects they will undertake. For example, pupils in Years 4 to 6 decide annually how they will engage with others in specific fundraising activities or what voluntary work they will undertake over the summer holidays. They make an excellent contribution both to the school and to the local community. All pupils have the opportunity to undertake responsibilities during the year which they fulfil willingly and responsibly. For example pupils in Year 3 act as mentors for children in the Reception, whilst representatives from each class represent the views of their peers in the school council. Pupils willingly contribute their time to raise large sums of money to help those who are less fortunate, and demonstrate that they have great empathy for others. For example, pupils in an assembly during the inspection were greatly moved to see what impact fundraising efforts can have in improving the lives of young people suffering from a brain tumour, a charity started in memory of a former young pupil at the school. Activities such as the community choir also help to develop pupils' understanding and appreciation of the importance of the wider community as pupils join with school staff, parents and others from the locality to perform as part of it. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of balancing mental and physical activity, and are provided plenty of opportunity for both. Almost every pupil engages in at least one physical activity in addition to their normal games and physical education lessons; many engage in a much wider range. All take part in some form of outdoor pursuit out of school, which they decide themselves and helps to build a sense of adventure. They are fully aware of the importance of a balanced diet and most choose to eat healthily at lunchtime. In this, they are helped greatly by the excellent choice of well-prepared healthy food choices each day. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe, both when undertaking activities online and in outdoor activities which involve an element of risk. The school does not shield pupils, but teaches them how to assess and deal sensibly with risk. Special activities such as The Warning Zone make an important contribution to pupils' safety as they consider real-life scenarios which relate to safety on the roads, on trains, when using the internet and how to avoid the

dangers of fire. All of these aspects of pupils' personal development are promoted through the excellent pastoral care provided by staff from the EYFS up to Year 3, and are then strengthened and developed through the activities pupils undertake as part of the Cophill Challenge which contributes strongly to their overall personal development.

- 4.4 The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Through their outdoor activities, they develop a profound appreciation of and respect for the natural world. For example, pupils in Year 1 were entranced by the birds' nests outside their window. Pupils have a very well-developed understanding of right and wrong. They respect the school rules which were formulated by the school council, and understand the need for sanctions, although these are rare. Behaviour throughout the school is excellent and pupils accept responsibility for their own actions. Relationships are also excellent, both amongst the pupils and between pupils and staff. Pupils greatly appreciate the help provided by their teachers, and older pupils value the opportunities to talk about any problems and to discuss their learning needs which are facilitated by small tutor groups. Pupils display empathy towards their classmates and enjoy encouraging and motivating others. They demonstrate respect for and sensitivity towards those from different backgrounds and traditions. Pupils work extremely well together in class and when working on special projects such as fundraising initiatives. They enjoy participating in house activities.
- 4.5 The school's proprietors and leaders have been highly successful in fulfilling their aims with regard to pupils' personal development which are enshrined in their definition of a Cophill Learner, and to provide a welcoming, stimulating and happy environment. In line with the school's aspirations, pupils emerge at the end of Year 6 as responsible citizens who are respectful, considerate, well-mannered and responsible for their own actions; independent explorers who are motivated, confident and aware of how they learn best; creative thinkers who are curious, imaginative and flexible in their approach to learning; problem solvers who are determined, willing to persevere and able to tackle difficulties; team players who are co-operative, encouraging and able to work as part of a group; and reflective learners who are able to set their own targets, adaptable and willing to try alternative methods. Almost every parent's pre-inspection questionnaire responses expressed satisfaction with the school's efforts to promote their children's personal development. They felt that the school promotes good behaviour; meets their children's pastoral and welfare needs effectively; encourages values of democracy, respect and tolerance; and provides an environment which supports their personal development. Pupils were equally positive, with the vast majority of those responding to the questionnaire saying that the school encourages them to behave well, to respect other people, and to be tolerant of those with different faiths and beliefs.