



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report  
For Schools with Residential Provision**

**Kent College Pembury**

**June 2023**

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## School's Details

|                                  |  |     |                   |     |
|----------------------------------|--|-----|-------------------|-----|
| <b>College</b>                   | Kent College Pembury   |     |                   |     |
| <b>DfE number</b>                | 886/6009   |     |                   |     |
| <b>Registered charity number</b> | 1142794  |     |                   |     |
| <b>Address</b>                   | Kent College Pembury<br>Old Church Road<br>Pembury<br>Tunbridge Wells<br>Kent<br>TN2 4AX |     |                   |     |
| <b>Telephone number</b>          | 01892 822006   |     |                   |     |
| <b>Email address</b>             | senioroffice@kentcollege.kent.sch.uk   |     |                   |     |
| <b>Head</b>                      | Miss Katrina Handford  |     |                   |     |
| <b>Chair of governors</b>        | Mr John Ingram   |     |                   |     |
| <b>Proprietor</b>                | Methodist Independent Schools Trust  |     |                   |     |
| <b>Age range</b>                 | 3 to 19  |     |                   |     |
| <b>Number of pupils on roll</b>  | 513  |     |                   |     |
|                                  | <b>Day pupils</b>  | 446 | <b>Boarders</b>   | 67  |
|                                  | <b>EYFS</b>  | 39  | <b>Juniors</b>    | 103 |
|                                  | <b>Seniors</b>   | 300 | <b>Sixth Form</b> | 71  |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>          | 20 to 22 June 2023   |     |                   |     |

## 1. Background Information

### About the school

1.1 Kent College Pembury is an independent day and boarding school for female pupils between the ages of three and nineteen and for male pupils between the ages of three and six. It was founded in 1886 in Folkestone by the Wesleyan Methodist Schools' Association and moved to its current rural location in Pembury, near Tunbridge Wells, in 1939.

1.2 The school is divided into two sections: the prep school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and the senior school. Accommodation for boarders comprises two boarding houses. They are organised to meet the needs of different age groups and arranged around a Victorian manor house, which is set in a 75-acre parkland site.

1.3 The school is part of the Methodist Independent Schools Trust, which acts as its proprietor, with governance delegated to the school's local governing body. Since the previous inspection, a new head was appointed in January 2022 and the school has started to admit male pupils.

### What the school seeks to do

1.4 The school aims to provide all pupils with an education that maximises academic aspirations and equips them to make a purposeful contribution as global citizens, whilst placing physical, spiritual and mental wellbeing at the heart of school life.

### About the pupils

1.5 Pupils come from a range of business and professional backgrounds, and most are from the surrounding counties. Just over a third of boarders are from the UK. Nationally standardised test data indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average for those taking similar tests. The school has identified 171 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include specific learning difficulties, 62 of whom receive specialist support. There are seven pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 68 pupils, 54 of whom receive additional support. The school modifies the curriculum for pupils it identifies as the most able in the school's population.

## 2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

### Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, including the National Minimum Standards for Boarding ('boarding NMS'), where applicable. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

**This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards, including the boarding NMS.** The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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.

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 published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

## Key findings

**2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

### **PART 1 – Quality of education provided**

2.2 In the prep school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).

2.3 In the senior school, the school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2019 to 2022 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).

2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place. Boarders have access to a suitable programme of activities.

2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.

**2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

### **PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Boarders are supported to develop good relationships with fellow pupils and staff which are based on mutual trust and respect. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.

**2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 13, 17 and 21 are met.**

### **PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.

2.10 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed.

**2.11 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996, and NMS 3, 5–12, 15, 16 and 20 are met.**

## **PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

2.12 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.

**2.13 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 19 and 22 are met.**

## **PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools**

2.14 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.

**2.15 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 4, 7 and 23 are met.**

## **PART 6 – Provision of information**

2.16 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.

**2.17 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are met.**

## **PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled**

2.18 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.

**2.19 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 14 are met.**

## **PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

2.20 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.

**2.21 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] and NMS 2 are met.**

### 3. Educational Quality Inspection

#### Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports 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.

**The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.**

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

| <i>School name</i> | <i>National Curriculum name</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Lower Sixth        | Year 12                         |
| Upper Sixth        | Year 13                         |

#### Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- Pupils make rapid progress in their learning and consequently achieve highly in public examinations.
  - Pupils are exceptionally creative and perform well in artistic and aesthetic subjects.
  - Pupils are eloquent communicators and readily articulate sophisticated viewpoints.
  - Pupils have advanced study skills and thinking skills.
  - Pupils show positive attitudes to learning and naturally reflect on ways to improve.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils are highly confident and are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
  - Pupils put into practice the Wesleyan philosophy of the school and are proud to do all the good that they can.
  - Most pupils have extremely strong, positive relations with each other and their teachers and collaborate well to achieve common goals.
  - Pupils have a deep respect for people with different backgrounds and lifestyles.
  - Pupils have a keen understanding of how to stay safe and healthy.

#### Recommendation

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
- Enhance the social development and confidence of boarders by developing further their participation in the life of the school community.



## The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 In the prep school, data provided indicate that pupils make higher than average progress. Pupils' results in public examinations are excellent. In the years 2019 and 2022 three-quarters of A level entries were awarded grades A\*-B, whilst three-fifths of entries at GCSE were graded 7–9. This level of performance was mirrored in the centre- and teacher-assessed grades in 2020 and 2021. Data show that these results represent excellent progress made by pupils at both GCSE A level. Pupils with SEND, EAL and those whom the school identifies as the most able make progress at least in line with their peers due to the individualised support which they receive. Since 2021, the school has offered BTEC courses in physical education and dance and most pupils have achieved distinction grades in these subjects. In the years 2020–22, most pupils have gone on to study courses with competitive entry requirements at selective universities. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a very large majority of parents who responded agreed that teaching enables their child to make progress. Much of this success is due to the robust scrutiny and support offered by the governing body.

3.6 Pupils achieve high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of the curriculum. This is as a result of the high expectations, strong subject knowledge and expertise that characterise the teaching, which challenges pupils at every step. This represents successful fulfilment of the school's ambitious aims enabled in part by the careful management of resources by the governing body, which has ensured that pupils enjoy high-quality facilities in which to learn. In the questionnaire, almost all parents agreed that the range of subjects available is suitable for their child. Pupils understand the important foundations of subjects well. For example, the youngest children understand dynamics in music. In an English lesson in Year 5, pupils showed high levels of prior knowledge and an understanding of how authors develop characters and settings and use language used to engage the interest of the reader. In a Spanish lesson in Year 7, pupils demonstrated high levels of understanding when talking to each other about their families. They responded to the stimulating and challenging teaching which encouraged them to try new words and phrases, without fear of failure, improving their fluency and confidence when talking and writing. Pupils with SEND were observed confidently explaining their logic and thinking in successfully solving multi-stage geometric problems, and pupils with EAL were enthusiastically engaged in a complex discussion about protected characteristics and different cultures' perspectives on discrimination and stereotyping. More able pupils' knowledge is extended and enriched through the 'Able, Interested and Motivated Students' (AIMS) programme and through project work such as a day spent exploring gender inequality in different parts of the world. All pupils make rapid progress because of well-planned interventions and support and a reflective approach to teaching, which is encouraged by the leadership.

3.7 Pupils display outstanding communication skills. From the youngest age, pupils speak with poise and confidence and listen with care and attention. They write and discuss confidently and coherently using technical language as appropriate, with increasingly complex language for their age. This is because the range of tasks which teachers employ contribute positively to the advancement of communication skills. In Year 3, pupils recall and use advanced vocabulary with ease, for example 'perpendicular' and 'attributes'. Year 10 pupils embraced the challenges of a public speaking training day and consequently displayed sophisticated communication skills in all its many forms, presenting cogently and responding to complex questions with ease whilst spontaneously drawing on a range of literary and cultural references. Pupils' communication skills in creative and aesthetic subjects are a notable strength, with high quality work in art, drama, music, food technology and textiles being produced by pupils of all ages.

3.8 Pupils display a solid understanding of number and efficient calculation strategies. They confidently use mathematics across the curriculum. For example, in a Year 2 lesson pupils were totally engaged in an outdoors activity to visualise the size of a blue whale by measuring with metre sticks and toilet paper. During a discussion, pupils in Year 6 showed cushions they had created, designed, cut to size, tie-dyed and sewn, using extremely accurate measuring skills. Older pupils used their numeracy skills to solve real-life problems such as analysing graphs in business studies and to interpret scientific data or understand concepts shown numerically in biology and chemistry.

3.9 Pupils are highly competent in the use of ICT. They are comfortable inhabiting the world of new technologies and understand the enabling role that ICT plays in support of their learning. From the youngest age, computing skills are developed through cross-curricular teaching. Older pupils skilfully use software applications, navigate digital platforms, and efficiently use online resources. They display proficiency in file management and effective internet research, for example in producing a presentation on Darwin's theory of evolution in biology.

3.10 Effective study skills such as time-management, organisation and independent learning are a notable strength of the pupils. They utilise a wide range of sources, such as textbooks and digital resources, and they demonstrate excellent research skills and critically evaluate information. This results in many high-quality projects being produced by pupils in almost every area of the curriculum. In an activity on floating and sinking, children in the EYFS were able to make predictions and hypothesise about which objects would float and which would sink. They used correct terminology and made logical predictions. In a year 9 group discussion, pupils demonstrated a heightened awareness of learning how to learn as a way to improve their understanding. Boarders collaborate well and progressively manage their study time more effectively due to the structured and supportive environment provided in the boarding houses. In the questionnaire, a very large majority of parents agreed that the school equips their child with the team-working, collaborative and research skills they need in later life.

3.11 Pupils are highly successful in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils' creative work in art, music and drama is of outstanding quality and often gains recognition at county and regional levels. Pupils enjoy high levels of success in LAMDA and Associated Board Music examinations. The school's choirs are regular winners in local arts festivals. Pupils' work in textiles regularly receives national recognition in the *Young Fashion Designer* competition. High numbers of pupils successfully complete the bronze level of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. In academic competitions pupils have been successful in writing and poetry competitions, maths challenges and science awards. In sport, pupils regularly represent their county in netball and hockey, with pupils being selected to represent England in the latter. Others have gained national recognition in gymnastics.

3.12 Pupils have exceptionally positive attitudes to all aspects of their learning. They have a 'can do' attitude and persevere at all ages, greatly enjoying working together. This is evident in their resilience, their learning behaviour and their determination to succeed. Pupils collaborate effectively because they are unselfish and learn to take turns from an early age. They display an excellent collective desire to advance their learning and show initiative and a willingness to listen to others. Pupils subscribe to a culture of aspiration, and they are keen to test their ideas in discussion. The initiative, independence and sheer enjoyment in an assembly recognising *World Music Day* united the school in appreciation of the performances of groups and individuals. Pupils have an excellent attitude towards school life, largely due to the positive relationships they form with peers and teachers.

## The quality of the pupils' personal development

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

3.14 Pupils show a strong sense of self-knowledge, recognising their strengths and weaknesses. Self-discipline and resilience were evident in their approach to challenges such as the team-building exercises carried out by the sports scholars' group. The recent production of *Amadeus* highlighted how the pupils are reflective, how they grow in confidence and how they adapt very easily to new situations. During end-of-year exams pupils sought feedback and engaged in reflective practices to enhance their academic progress. Pupils' self-understanding builds as they progress through each section of the school, nurtured by excellent welfare and pastoral support. Pupils thrive because the governance and leadership are highly successful in creating an ethos where pupils of all ages are encouraged to develop an understanding of how to improve their learning, creating the space and the time for pupils to develop excellent personal skills and self-awareness and explore personal strengths and aspirations.

3.15 Pupils have a very good understanding of the consequences of their own decisions and correct choices which can lead to success and wellbeing. Boarders understand that choices made regarding study habits, goal setting and time management directly impact their academic performance and they appreciate the structure they are given. Pupils in Year 9 were able to recite the Wesleyan values of the school and the articulation of clear expectations of behaviour markedly assists the informed decisions the pupils make.

3.16 Pupils are highly appreciative of non-material aspects of life, as evidenced by their attitudes. In a Year 6 English lesson on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the forest pupils were highly motivated to use the environment as a stage and took time to stop and listen to what they could hear and look at what they could see. The school plays a crucial role in nurturing pupils' spiritual understanding by creating a supportive environment that encourages exploration and reflection. The chaplaincy is at the heart of the community and pupils welcome the opportunity it presents to be still, quiet, reflective and aware of the needs of others. Pupils love the physical environment of their school and have an excellent understanding of how this, and the opportunities it affords them, aids their spirituality. Excellent work in art and textiles displayed throughout the school shows a real spiritual awareness and appreciation of beauty.

3.17 Pupils demonstrate a strong ability to distinguish right from wrong. They exhibit a sense of personal responsibility for their actions and display positive behaviour towards others, such as empathy, kindness, and respect. Year 6 pupils believe they are treated fairly and have input into deciding classroom rules. Pupils are excellent at calling out behaviour which they recognise as unfair, unkind, or unacceptable. Pupils said in discussions that they regarded members of staff and older pupils as role models and very much looked up to and respected them. Pupils value and support the school's rules and feel that the system of rewards and sanctions works really well to support the expectations of teachers, unanimously agreeing that it is fairly and consistently applied. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all pupils agreed that the school expects pupils to behave well.

3.18 Most pupils have extremely strong, positive relations with each other and their teachers and collaborate well to achieve common goals. However, it was observed that in some areas boarders were not always fully integrated into the life of the school and consequently occasionally lacked the same level of social confidence as that of their peers. Pupils recognise the importance of understanding and respecting others' perspectives, cultures, and experiences. They demonstrate excellent teamwork skills, such as active listening, communication, and cooperation, enabling them to work collaboratively, as exemplified by the BTEC dance pupils working to choreograph the Year 7 and Year 8 dance show.

3.19 The pupils' contribution to others, the school and the community is excellent. This is underpinned by the school's Methodist ethos which pupils proudly live out through 'doing all the good you can', and the prized Wesley badge is valued as the highest accolade in the school. Boarders exhibit a sense of community and contribute to creating a positive and supportive environment. Pupils participate in community service initiatives and volunteer work addressing social, environmental, and humanitarian issues. The school officer positions provide opportunities for leadership development and the new head girl's team has clear and

aspirational ideas to make a positive difference to the lives of others inside and outside school. Pupils actively participate in civic activities such as their work in a local hospice and other local organisations.

3.20 Pupils are highly respectful, valuing diversity within their school community. Displays of pupils' work around the school depict a wide variety of cultures and traditions. Pupils welcome and support everyone, whatever their culture or background, and form highly positive relationships. They exhibit appreciation for their own cultural heritage and possess a genuine curiosity and interest in learning about other cultures. Pupils show sensitivity and tolerance towards individuals from different backgrounds and traditions, fostering a harmonious environment. This is particularly clear in the boarding houses. Pupils are equipped with the necessary skills and attitudes to thrive in a diverse society and contribute positively to the promotion of cultural understanding.

3.21 Pupils demonstrate a strong understanding of personal safety measures, including online. In the questionnaire, almost all pupils agreed that they understand how to stay safe online. Pupils also exhibit awareness of the importance of physical and mental health, understanding the significance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Pupils talk highly about the quality of food and the free access to fruit during the day. The youngest children in the EYFS play carefully in the outdoor area and have a healthy understanding of risks. In a science lesson, pupils confidently explained electrical safety. Pupils feel cared for, well-prepared for life, and understand how to keep themselves safe in many different contexts. This was strongly emphasised in discussions with the pupils, who spoke with enthusiasm about how well they are supported and advised by the school and their teachers.

## 4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Mr Alasdair McBay    | Reporting inspector  |
| Mr Jeremy Gibson     | Compliance team inspector (Consultant bursar, ISBA)            |
| Mrs Loraine Cavanagh | Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)                      |
| Mr Jay Piggot        | Team inspector (Former headmaster, HMC school)                 |
| Miss Jane Sheppard   | Team inspector (Head of lower school and nursery, IAPS school) |
| Mr Liam Copley       | Team inspector for boarding (Deputy head, HMC school)          |