



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ST CHRISTOPHER SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

St Christopher School

Full Name of School	St Christopher School		
DCSF Number	919/6028		
Registered Charity Number	311062		
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Email Address	richard.palmer@stchris.co.uk		
Head	Mr Richard Palmer		
Chair of Governors	Mr Vernon McClure		
Age Range	3 to 19		
Total Number of Pupils	506		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (305 boys; 201 girls;)		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	0	5-11: 129
	3-5 (EYFS):	36	11-18: 341
Number of Day Pupils	476		
Number of Boarders	Total:	30	
	Full:	30	Weekly: 0
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection date/EYFS	08 Feb 2010 to 09 Feb 2010		
Final (team) visit	08 Mar 2010 to 10 Mar 2010		

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. It consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in January 2004.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
- (b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
- (c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) The premises and accommodation
- (g) The provision of information
- (h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

Under the Care Standards Act 2000, an inspection of boarding was carried out at the same time by the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The report of this inspection is available separately at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 St Christopher School is a co-educational, day and boarding school situated in Letchworth Garden City. It is registered as an educational, charitable company administered by a board of governors. Accommodation is in purpose-built and converted buildings set in extensive grounds. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) occupies a grade II-listed building a short distance from the main school. Since its foundation in 1915, by members of the Theosophical Education Trust, the school has retained its philosophy of informality, vegetarianism and mutual tolerance. A strong history of self-government supports its aim to be a developing community of children and adults working together in an informal atmosphere where all are valued as individuals and encouraged to develop in curiosity, competence, judgement, kindness and courage.
- 1.2 At the time of inspection, 506 pupils were on roll. Of the 23 pupils in the Montessori nursery, 13 attend part-time. In the junior school, 13 Reception pupils are aged under 5 years, 31 pupils are aged 5 to 7 years and 98 are aged 7 to 11 years. Of the 341 pupils in senior school, 264 are aged 11 to 16 years and 77 pupils are in the sixth form. The total number of pupils includes 201 girls and 305 boys. A total of 30 pupils are boarders. English is an additional language for nine pupils of whom seven receive support from the school. Five pupils have statements of special educational need, funded by the local authority and a further 159 have been identified as having individual learning needs. Of these, 50 receive learning support from the school. Many of these pupils are dyslexic and are highly able.
- 1.3 Registered as an educational charitable company, the school is administered by a board of governors. The school is strongly committed to a high standard of pastoral care and the development of talents through a wide range of extra-curricular activities in music, the arts and sport. Pupils are prepared for happy, fulfilled lives in the service of others. Since the previous report in January 2004, accommodation has undergone extensive refurbishment.
- 1.4 The school caters for a wide ability range. Pupils entering reception, junior school and senior school have ability profiles just above the national average. The ability of pupils entering the sixth form is in line with the national average.
- 1.5 Most pupils live locally but approximately 80 older pupils travel a greater distance to attend the school. At the time of the inspection there were 30 boarders, of whom fifteen were girls and fifteen boys, between the ages of eleven and eighteen. Approximately a fifth of day pupils and a quarter of boarders are from minority ethnic descent, of whom three live overseas.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL AND ACTION POINTS

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 From the EYFS onwards, pupils are enthusiastic about their work and keen to succeed. Overall, the junior school pupils' performance is good, and in Reception they make progress in English and mathematics which is above average for pupils of similar ability. Standards in the senior school are above average, and pupils make good progress. Attainment in A level and GCSE examinations is high when compared with the national average for all maintained schools. Opportunities for challenge in the senior school, to develop the pupils' curiosity through independent learning, are sometimes limited. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and demonstrate high level numeracy and literacy skills. Excellent behaviour contributes to academic achievement and obvious enjoyment in lessons. Pupils work well together and respect their teachers' judgements and advice. The curriculum enables all abilities to achieve their potential. An excellent programme of extra-curricular activities contributes to their understanding and appreciation of the world around them. Teachers know their pupils well and, through well-planned lessons and a variety of activities, engage pupils' interest. Overall, marking is constructive and, in the best examples, informs pupils how they might improve the quality of their work.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is outstanding and a strength of the school. The empathetic commitment of staff to the school's ethos supports the excellent pastoral care. Pupils are consulted on issues impacting on their experiences at St Christopher; they respond with due regard to the wellbeing of all members of the community. Detailed welfare procedures are adhered to by the staff. The school council is well respected and encourages pupils to contribute to their community in a very positive way. Boarding makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development and supports their academic progress. Pupils at St Christopher grow in confidence and are prepared for the next stage in their education.
- 2.3 The school ethos is fostered through clear-sighted governance and leadership which is committed to pupils' academic and personal progress. Weaknesses in the previous inspection concerning the use of assessment information in junior school and staff development in senior school have been addressed effectively. Dynamic leadership and strong management are now aware of their responsibilities to ensure all policies and procedures comply with regulatory requirements, though some omissions have occurred in the past. Management at department level is efficient overall and the effectiveness of monitoring the quality of lessons and assessment is developing. In their pre-inspection questionnaires, parents were satisfied with the quality of educational provision and felt the school instils in their children worthwhile attitudes and values. The school has responded positively to a few concerns regarding poor behaviour through a focus on classroom management.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school did not meet all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003, as subsequently amended, and therefore it was required to:
- record in the central register the names of any staff who start with List 99 while waiting for a CRB disclosure and add a note to confirm that the person is under supervision. [Regulation 4C, under (4) (d).]
- 2.5 At the time of the final team visit, the school had addressed the above requirement. The centralised register had been revised to ensure that any staff waiting for a CRB disclosure are supervised.
- 2.6 In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school was required to:
- ensure that it has obtained an enhanced CRB disclosure before adults take up their appointment.

Since the Early Years Foundation Stage provision is inspected under a different system of regulation, within a two-day limit, the report cannot mention any regulatory deficiencies which are remedied by the end of the standard inspection.

(ii) Recommended action

- 2.7 The school has many strengths and to improve provision further it is advised to make the following improvements:
1. raise the quality of all marking to the standard of the best and always include written guidance on ways in which pupils can improve their work;
 2. introduce ways for pupils to develop their natural curiosity through independent research and more challenging tasks for the most able;
 3. in the EYFS, provide more opportunities for the children in the nursery and Reception to share activities enabling them to learn from each other; and
 4. continue with the plans to modernise the Reception classroom and make greater use of ICT in the nursery.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

- 3.1 Standards are above average and the progress that pupils make is good overall. From the EYFS onwards, pupils reach good standards in their learning, attitudes and skills, in line with the school's aims. In the junior school, standardised tests show that progress is good in nearly all years. In the senior school, pupils are making good progress in relation to their ability, gaining above-average grades at both GCSE and A level.
- 3.2 The school meets its aim to help pupils develop curiosity, competence and judgement. In lessons and written work, they show a high level of understanding with no difference in standards between boys and girls. The pupils' excellent behaviour contributes to the progress they make in their work. Children with LLD make marked progress towards their individual targets. Pupils are highly articulate, and samples of their work displayed around the school are testament to their ability to write in factual and imaginative context. In the junior school, pupils respond well to challenges and solving problems. However, a marked inconsistency exists between the standards reached in mathematics and English across the junior year groups. The school has made this a focus for improvement. In the senior school, pupils have well-developed mathematical skills and apply these effectively. Pupils are adept at collaborating, both in organised pair work and informally. In general, opportunities for independent learning are limited in the senior school, although, when given challenging material, pupils respond well.
- 3.3 Pupils use information and communications technology (ICT) effectively to further their learning. For example, during Morning Talk, an excellent video of the French exchange, compiled and edited by pupils, was played to the whole school. Throughout the school, pupils do very well in music, drama and sport.
- 3.4 The record of team and individual successes is extensive. Twenty pupils play sport at county level or above, including national representation in trampolining. The Year 10 basketball team has won the district championship for the third year running. Other successes include selection of pupils for the National Youth Theatre and the London Dance School. Pupils have been successful in both the Primary and Senior Maths Challenge. The school has been recognised by the Arts Council with an Artsmark Gold award. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is increasingly popular; pupils achieve Gold, Silver and Bronze levels of award. These successes owe much to the determination of all pupils to succeed and to make the most of their talents, and the opportunities the school provides to develop them.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)

- 3.5 Curricular provision, from the EYFS onwards, is excellent and covers all the required areas of learning. Since the previous inspection, it has been revised to match the ages, abilities, needs and interests of pupils more fully, ensuring they receive an all-round education that meets the school aim to develop their curiosity and competence. The effective learning support department produces suitable material and guidance for implementing strategies to support pupils with LDD. Trained teaching assistants help in all classes and support pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). These pupils make good progress in both junior and senior school. The development of a gifted and talented policy and a detailed handbook provide teachers with ideas for developing higher order thinking skills and developing classroom challenge. French is taught by native speakers from Reception, and Spanish from Year 7. Subjects such as dance, photography and media studies enrich the creative aspect of the curriculum. Concerts are given regularly where junior and senior pupils perform together. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme covers a suitable range of topics.
- 3.6 The provision for pupils to develop their skills and talents beyond the classroom is a strength of the school. In the senior school, the very popular options afternoon of extra-curricular activities offers a wealth of opportunities to attain new skills in areas as varied as silk screen printing, jazz band, trampolining and the astronomy club. The school's indoor pool enables all pupils to enjoy and develop their water skills, and junior pupils have a swimming lesson each week. All pupils take part in some activities and their achievements are reported to parents alongside those in academic subjects. Cultural awareness is supported by a wide range of visits to local museum workshops and places of historical interest; by visiting speakers including local artists and theatre companies as well as by residential opportunities linked to academic subjects and of general interest. An annual adventure week is spent by Year 5 in the Brecon Beacons and a residential visit to study the settlement of York helps bond new pupils entering Year 6 before their transfer to the senior school. In Morning Talk in the junior school, pupils listened with interest to a presentation from sixth formers who had visited and worked in a school in Rajasthan.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.7 The overall standard of teaching is good with some excellent features, enabling pupils to develop their academic potential in line with the school's aims. In a small proportion of the lessons observed, activities were dominated by the teacher and had limited opportunity to exercise their skills in independent research. Nor were they always sufficiently challenged. The work of the teaching and learning group has been the driving force in improving communication between different sections of the school and cross-curricular liaison. Establishing new teaching strategies is a focus at all levels. Arrangements for peer assessment amongst staff, to share good practice, could be more systematic and more widespread.
- 3.8 Teachers demonstrate extensive subject knowledge throughout the school. Nearly all the lessons observed were well planned, ensuring a brisk pace and a variety of activities to motivate pupils and maintain their interest. Teachers know their pupils well and with perceptive questioning encouraged the least confident pupils to express their views and contribute to discussions. In junior school science, time for contemplation gave pupils the opportunity to express their appreciation of the natural world. In lessons where the pupils' ICT skills were used effectively, they made rapid progress in their learning. Most classrooms have interactive whiteboards. Examples of their effective use to captivate the pupils' interest and support their learning were observed in geography, languages and mathematics across the school. Imaginative homework enabled pupils to consolidate their learning and allowed the more able to explore beyond the topic. Since the previous inspection, which referred to incidences of challenging pupil behaviour, staff have used positive behaviour management successfully as the dominant technique to bring about improvement.
- 3.9 The effective use of assessment data has improved in response to a recommendation in the previous inspection report. Through the analysis of assessments, monitoring of schemes of work and lesson planning, strategies for developing suitable tasks and methods of supporting students of all abilities were evident in some lessons; however, their use has yet to become universal. The marking of pupils' work is regular and encourages pupils to produce well-presented and organised work. In some marking, helpful comments are written about the quality of the work and how it can be improved. Some inconsistency exists across both subjects and year groups in the frequency of marking and the quality of written feedback.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The personal development of pupils is outstanding. The school is successful in its aim to be a continuously developing community where all are valued and work together to develop competence, judgement, kindness and courage. A shared commitment to learning, adventure and self-discovery is very much in evidence. Since the previous inspection, the pastoral structure has been augmented and the PSHE provision reviewed.
- 4.2 Spiritual awareness, in pupils of all ages, including children in the EYFS, is excellent. Pupils think deeply about their lives and appreciate the world about them. An awareness of the beauty of their natural environment is developed in the sciences and the importance of careful stewardship explained in other parts of the curriculum. A strong sense of service to others is promoted throughout the school.
- 4.3 Pupils develop a strong sense of right and wrong. The underlying framework for democracy in the school, with regular council meetings and the articulate pupil voice, nurtures self-governance and responsibility. Junior pupils have devised the green Citizenship Award cards and nominate recipients. Presentations from visiting speakers introduce pupils to global issues and pupils have taken part in a Fair Trade fortnight. In their questionnaires, pupils say they have plenty of opportunity to accept posts of responsibility, that these are taken seriously and pupils are willing to serve in the interest of others. The environment committee has introduced the school to the importance of being "green", and organised fund raising for Water Aid and projects in Kosovo. Charitable work extends beyond fund raising to organising events for a variety of groups in the community including the elderly.
- 4.4 Pupils have well-developed social skills. They enjoy each other's company and recognise that they can organise events if they wish. Social spaces in the school have been refurbished to include activities requested by pupils. Week-long visits to Wales and York have given junior pupils the opportunity to exercise responsibility and to make a contribution to community life. Whole-school events such as the recycled fashion show, Peace One Day and the United Nations Day for Change have given pupils the chance to work collaboratively and for juniors to see senior pupils as role models. At a coffee morning, Year 12 students applied democratic principles to organising the Leavers Ball. Pupils across the school are at ease with each other and welcoming to visitors.
- 4.5 The pupils' excellent cultural development is promoted by a rich immersion in art; impressive examples of their work adorn the school, and music and drama are well represented in their cultural diet. A Year 9 class discussed the cultural tensions in a ball scene in Romeo and Juliet with maturity. Work to promote global citizenship is strikingly successful across the school. Pupils in Year 6 were tasked to consider the difficulties encountered by refugee children fleeing to find safe haven from Iraq. Cultural exchanges with Europe, as well as India and Kosovo, offer pupils an insight into other ways of life. Projects promoting cross-cultural activities are relished by the pupils and for many have been life-changing experiences.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.6 The development of the individual pupil is at the centre of the school's ethos and arrangements for the welfare and pastoral care of pupils, throughout the school, are excellent. The school fulfils its aim to be a community where all are valued as individuals. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, pupils say their teachers show concern for them. Pupils are well prepared for happy and fulfilled lives in the service of others.
- 4.7 Pupils are registered daily in companies (form groups) by their advisers (form tutors). Advisers give outstanding attention to the individual in company time, know their pupils very well and work closely with the heads of year to monitor academic and personal development. The informal and friendly environment in the school does not compromise the respect shown by all members of the school community for one another. Relationships are positive between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves. In conversation, pupils expressed appreciation of the caring nature of the school; saying that they feel safe and that they always have someone to whom they can turn if they have problems.
- 4.8 The school has a long tradition of self-government and the expectations that all pupils take responsibility for their actions and are mindful of the needs of others are well met. School councils, in both junior and senior schools, give pupils the opportunity to debate local and global issues as well as those impacting on their life in the school. Each company has a councillor and sixth formers stand for election as major officials who meet with the head for lunch once a week to discuss school matters.
- 4.9 The school has a well-formulated anti-bullying policy and pupils say the school deals effectively with any incidents that may occur. Since the previous inspection, clear policies on behaviour have been introduced and pupils' behaviour is exemplary. A well-understood system of green and pink slips recognises good and bad behaviour or work. Whilst in their questionnaire returns a few senior pupils disagreed, the majority of pupils felt sanctions and rewards are given fairly.
- 4.10 The school has appropriate policies and procedures for dealing with bullying, health and safety of pupils in school and on trips, and behaviour. The safeguarding policy outlines procedures for reporting concerns and is available to staff, pupils and parents. Named staff and governors are responsible for child protection. Both they and all staff are trained in child protection matters at the required intervals. Revised procedures to ensure safe recruitment of staff are now in place. Appropriate risk assessments supported by proper care and attention to detail, including cleanliness and tidiness, are in place. Fire precautions are checked regularly and regular fire drills are properly recorded. The Bursar has a defined programme for maintenance and refurbishment to ensure that a safe and secure environment for pupils is provided. The access plan for those with physical or learning difficulties has clear objectives and time scales. The school has appropriate facilities for sick pupils and well-qualified staff are on duty to offer advice. They provide effective care for day pupils and boarders. All medicines are securely stored and safely administered, and staff are trained in first aid. Pupils learn how to stay healthy; the vegetarian school meals are varied and nutritious, and extensive opportunities for involvement in sport or fitness activities are provided. Admission and attendance registers are accurately maintained and correctly stored.

4.(c) The quality of boarding education

- 4.11 The quality of boarding education is good. A recent boarding inspection by Ofsted found that the skilled and competent staff ensure boarders receive the best possible boarding experience. No recommendations for improvement were made. The pupils' personal and academic performance is very well supported by life in boarding. Through very positive relationships, with boarding staff and each other, pupils develop self-confidence and the ability to contribute to community life.
- 4.12 The school has made a positive move towards weekly boarding to suit the needs of modern family life and arrangements are made for boarders who wish to stay over the weekend, as the need arises. The generous staff ratio helps to create a strong family atmosphere in the two boarding houses. House parents provide excellent personal support and, through liaison with academic staff, oversee the pupils' educational development well.
- 4.13 Relationships are excellent; the boarders understand the routines and the school's expectations for appropriate conduct. Older boarders readily accept responsibility for supervision and for arranging social events in the houses. In conversation, boarders say they are happy in their houses; they feel safe and secure and appreciate the support they receive. The school provides excellent health care, supported by a counsellor, school nurse and an independent listener. Boarders are able to maintain contact with their families and have mobile telephones. The use of e-mail and social networking is strictly controlled. The headmaster is head of boarding. He is available in the evenings and at weekends and meets with boarders regularly to listen to concerns and suggestions.
- 4.14 A wide range of activities is available in the evenings. Boarders have access to the swimming-pool, library and ICT rooms. Those who stay over the weekend relocate to a wing and become part of the house parents' family. They enjoy visits to the cinema and theatre and doing 'family things'.
- 4.15 Accommodation is of a high quality and the majority of boarders have their own rooms. Up to Year 11, boarders are in Arundale House located centrally in the senior school. Sixth form boarders have their own house, Arunside, where they become more independent. Ample space in both houses allows for recreation, private study, social events and access to outdoor areas for games or relaxing. The introduction of cooking facilities has been very popular.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The school is well governed by a board of nine members including a parent governor. Following an assessment of skills, governors are deployed to provide effective oversight of the school. True to the aims of the school, the governing body conducts its business with due regard to the views of all members of the school community.
- 5.2 The governors are well informed of educational standards through the head's report at each meeting and through regular presentations from staff. They seek parental views through questionnaires and have close contacts with the parents' circle. A governors' visiting programme ensures regular contact with pupils and staff during the working school day; some governors are linked to particular departments for these visits. Governors meet pupils when attending school council meetings, Morning Talk and lessons. The governing body is represented at all major school events.
- 5.3 Prior to drawing up the school development plan, governors carried out a self-assessment of their effectiveness. Those who have legal and financial backgrounds work closely with the bursar. They administer contracts and school finances efficiently, and are thus able to offer bursaries. They ensure the school premises are safe, clean and well maintained, with suitably equipped areas for specialist teaching. Their commitment to the aims of the school, their understanding of the challenges of day-to-day management and their recognition of the legal requirements of governance underpin their valuable contribution to whole-school growth and development.
- 5.4 The governors have been successful in appointing and retaining a highly-qualified staff. Since the previous report, their support for the development of staff, through appraisal systems and staff training, has been established throughout the school. The governing body is aware of its statutory duties regarding children's welfare. Named governors have been trained to take responsibility for safeguarding, child protection, welfare, health and safety. However, in the past arrangements for staff recruitment were not always robust.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.5 The school benefits from the strong leadership. True to the aims of the school, leadership at all levels, including in the EYFS, supports a community based on mutual respect, trust and tolerance. This is achieved through the school's emphasis on providing an appropriate curriculum, a wide range of extra-curricular activities and support for the development of strong personal values in all its pupils. Members of the senior management team (SMT) set a firm educational direction and clear expectation of the outcomes for pupils. Following a review of departments across the school, successful progress has been made towards the strategic aim of putting the quality of teaching and learning at the forefront of professional development. The SMT monitors provision through observing lessons, overseeing departmental planning and records of achievement. Heads of department are required to observe lessons at least once per term as part of the new appraisal process. Since the previous inspection, greater use is made of assessment information in the junior school to enhance the pupils' progress and, in the senior school, a focus on good class management has raised expectations of acceptable behaviour.
- 5.6 The SMT is aware that pride should not stifle innovation and is constantly looking for ways to improve pupils' experience at the school. The school development plan is based on the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters framework. Prior to setting objectives, consultation with pupils, parents and staff is used to identify concerns and aspirations and the resulting targets are shared with the whole school community. Progress is monitored regularly and evaluation includes self-assessment of the effectiveness of leadership and management.
- 5.7 The selection of high quality staff is seen as a priority. The school is committed to supporting staff development. A staff induction programme ensures all new staff understand the school's philosophy and are fully committed to its aims. In order to support a strategic focus on teaching and learning a new annual appraisal system was introduced in 2009-10. This robust system is aimed at supporting the whole-school strategic plan and identifying priorities for continued professional development. Outcomes from appraisal, from parental and pupil questionnaires and consultations are used to target this training. All staff are trained in child protection matters every three years, and they fully understand their responsibilities for children's welfare. The central register of appointments is complete and all the regulatory information is now properly entered, checked and kept up-to-date.
- 5.8 The head knows his staff and pupils well, and he is a constant presence around the school. Pupils feel valued as individuals and well cared for. At the same time, they know much is expected of them and of their contribution to the school and the wider community.

5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.9 The school has maintained the good and constructive relationship with parents noted in the previous inspection. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the education the school provides; virtually all parents feel the school promotes worthwhile attitudes and views as well as offering a wide range of activities beyond the classroom. A small minority disagreed with the statement that the school achieves high levels of behaviour. However, during the inspection week, beyond the few instances of exuberance and the apparent informality of relationships, a high degree of self-discipline and mutual respect was observed.
- 5.10 The school keeps parents well informed about the school and about their children's progress. It makes full use of email as well as of the annual information booklet, newsletters, parents' evenings and appointments and parents have access to officially required information, including policies and procedures, on the school website. Parental surveys are regularly conducted to elicit parental views and suggestions. Parents receive helpful interim and yearly reports with details of effort, achievement and punctuality and comments to highlight what pupils need to do to improve. This information is supplemented by parents' consultations, twice yearly in the senior school and termly in the junior school; in addition, parents can make additional appointments as necessary.
- 5.11 A small minority of parents felt they have few opportunities to be involved in the work and progress of their children. However, inspectors found plenty of opportunities were open to parents. Since the previous inspection, the parents circle has become more active in involving parents in organising social events and communicating details of information evenings covering topics of interest to parents; these have included drug awareness and junior school curriculum.
- 5.12 Parental concerns are usually dealt with informally through direct contact with the senior management team or teachers. If an informal, direct approach to discuss a concern is insufficient, alternative strategies are deployed effectively so that a resolution is found. The comprehensive complaints policy is available to all parents and is published on the school website. The school values its partnership with parents, carers and guardians.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.

6. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

6.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.1 The overall effectiveness in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS is good. Staff recognise the uniqueness of each child through detailed monitoring of learning and development, giving particular attention to individual learning styles and the child's preferred learning environment. The nursery manager and the Reception class teacher have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, and there is a strong commitment to continuous improvement through ongoing self-evaluation.

6.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.2 Leadership and management are good with some outstanding features. Policies and procedures are reviewed annually to ensure the educational and welfare needs of all children are met. The school has not always been sufficiently rigorous in carrying out the required recruitment checks on a few members of staff before appointment. This deficiency has now been rectified and all other welfare policies and procedures are effectively implemented. Practitioners have developed the EYFS curriculum within the nursery whilst retaining the principles and practice of the Montessori curriculum. Resources and staff are well deployed to provide children with a stimulating and supportive environment. The setting works very effectively with parents and outside agencies to support the children's learning. Parents indicated in the questionnaire that they are very happy with the education provided for their children.

6.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.3 The quality of provision is good. Practitioners are effective in supporting learning and development due to their excellent knowledge and understanding of children from regular observations and assessments, enabling them to provide a wide range of suitable experiences to meet their needs. However, although it is on the same campus, the distance of the Montessori nursery from the Reception class means the EYFS does not function as a cohesive unit, which limits the opportunities for shared activities. The recently refurbished nursery is an excellent facility but the lack of space in Reception places constraints on larger group activities. Children in both classes experience purposeful play and exploration every day, but in the nursery, insufficient use is made of ICT. Opportunities for active learning are good: additional learning and development needs are identified and children are well supported. High priority is given to safeguarding, with children's health and welfare significantly enhanced by consistent implementation of policies, procedures and practice. Learning resources are safe and appropriate with regular safety checks carried out. Staff are good role models and are skilled in the behaviour management of children.

6.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 6.4 The outcomes for children are good. They are happy, motivated and eager to learn. Children make good progress and some make excellent progress across all areas of the curriculum. They are articulate and enjoy conversation, offering their answers and ideas confidently; for example, they explained the instructions for manoeuvring the programmable toys clearly and confidently. Children are imaginative and curious, showing interest in a broad range of activities. Their personal development is excellent. They are well behaved, confident to take responsibility such as being monitors and show high levels of independence. They demonstrate very good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and safe, and they respect each other's differences whilst playing together in harmony.

What the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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

The National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools were inspected by one Ofsted inspector over two days.

Inspectors

Mrs Patricia Cullen	Reporting inspector
Mr John Cox	Senior Team Inspector (Head of Department, HMC)
Mrs Gillian De La Torre	Junior Team Inspector (Retired Deputy Head ISA)
Mrs Linda Griffith	Junior Team Inspector (Head of School (Prep), ISA)
Mr Nicholas Plater	Senior Team Inspector (Director of Studies, HMC)
Mrs Tessa Smith	Senior Team Inspector (Retired Head GSA, IAPS)
Mrs Susan Sunderland	Junior Team Inspector (Head, IAPS)
Mr Nicholas Weaver	Senior Team Inspector (Deputy Head, HMC)
Mrs Valerie Goode	Early Years Lead Inspector