



Pipers Corner School

# Independent Schools Inspectorate Inspection Report Spring 2010



“Pupils’ successful achievement is supported by their excellent attitudes to learning, their exemplary behaviour and the positive relationships they enjoy between themselves and with staff.”

“Throughout the school, the quality of pupils’ personal development is excellent, promoted by strong relationships within the community and by outstanding pastoral care.”



“Staff know their pupils well and this helps to create a happy caring environment in which pupils thrive.”



“The school’s atmosphere and ethos encourage pupils to flourish in a community to which they contribute greatly.”



“Stimulating and effective teaching takes place in all parts of the school”

“Pupils are friendly and outgoing, and their manners and behaviour exemplary.”



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**PIPERS CORNER SCHOOL**

**STANDARD INSPECTION**

**FINAL VISIT**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Pipers Corner School

Full Name of School	<b>Pipers Corner School</b>		
DCSF Number	<b>825/6017</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>310635</b>		
Address	<b>Pipers Corner School Great Kingshill High Wycombe Buckinghamshire HP15 6LP</b>		
Telephone Number	<b>01494 718255</b>		
Fax Number	<b>01494 719806</b>		
Email Address	<b>theschool@piperscorner.co.uk</b>		
Headmistress	<b>Mrs Helen Ness-Gifford</b>		
Chairman of Governors	<b>Mr Rodney Corner</b>		
Age Range	<b>3 to 18</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>485</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Girls</b>		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	<b>0</b>	5-11: <b>105</b>
	3-5 (EYFS):	<b>14</b>	11-18: <b>366</b>
Number of Day Pupils	<b>452</b>	Capacity for flexi-boarding:	<b>8</b>
Number of Boarders	Total: <b>33</b>		
	Full: <b>19</b>	Weekly: <b>14</b>	
Head of EYFS Setting	<b>Mrs E Rushforth</b>		
EYFS Gender	<b>Girls</b>		
Inspection date/EYFS	<b>9 Feb 2010 to 10 Feb 2010</b>		
Final (team) visit	<b>8 Mar 2010 to 10 Mar 2010</b>		

## 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 March 2006.

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 31<sup>st</sup> 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.

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 Pipers Corner is predominantly a day school with a small boarding community for girls from three to eighteen. Founded in 1930 and established in Great Kingshill in 1945, it is situated in a beautiful, rural location in the Chilterns above the town of High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is located in Woodlands, a self-contained unit on the school site. It comprises a pre-reception class for children aged three, who may attend on a full or a part-time basis, and a reception class for four-year-olds. The school has excellent facilities. It has a Christian foundation and strong Christian ethos, although it encourages sensitivity and understanding of the beliefs of others. It is governed by a board of governors. The school aims to create a secure and happy environment in which social responsibility, integrity and mutual respect are emphasised and in which spiritual and moral development are paramount. The school is committed to high standards of pastoral care. Since the last inspection a new arts building, a prep library, and art, technology and science facilities have been completed.
- 1.2 The numbers on roll in the EYFS setting are fourteen, and a hundred and five in the Pre-prep and Prep departments. The senior school comprises a total of 366 girls aged from eleven to eighteen, including sixty-two girls in the sixth form. There are twenty full boarders and thirteen weekly boarders with a capacity for some flexi-boarding. Entry to the senior school is by examination, which identifies a good average cohort, and places are offered in order of date registration. A number of pupils enter at sixth form level. The ability profiles of pupils in the Prep Department and in Years 7 to 11 are above the national average. The ability profile of the Sixth Form is similar to the national average for students taking A-level courses. Ninety-nine pupils receive specialist learning support and eight pupils receive support for their English.
- 1.3 Pupils come mainly from professional and business families and a small number are from minority ethnic families. Virtually all sixth-form pupils proceed to higher education, a few after taking a gap year.

- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following tables.

***Early Years Foundation Stage Setting***

School	NC name
Pre-Reception	Nursery

***Pre-prep and Prep Department***

School	NC name
Pre-Prep 1	Year 1
Pre-Prep 2	Year 2
LII	Year 3
UII	Year 4
LIII	Year 5
UIII	Year 6

***Senior School***

School	NC name
LIV	Year 7
MIV	Year 8
UIV	Year 9
LV	Year 10
UV	Year 11
L6	Year 12
U6	Year 13



## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL AND ACTION POINTS**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 The pupils throughout the school are successful in their learning; they show understanding and make good progress. A wide ranging curriculum and programme of activities, available inside and out of school, are strengths. The recently introduced Sixth Form enrichment programme has established firm foundations for future development. The lively and enthusiastic teaching is predominantly good and sometimes excellent. Teaching is well planned and varied, and mostly challenging. Pupils' progress is sustained in lessons with pace and focus. Marking and assessment are variable across subjects and is an area for development. Opportunities for independent learning have improved since the last inspection. The school is currently implementing extension programmes for its most able. Pupils' successful achievement is supported by their excellent attitudes to learning, their exemplary behaviour and the positive relationships they enjoy between themselves and with staff. They are well motivated, hard working and show commitment to their studies.
- 2.2 Pupils' personal development is outstanding, and is supported by excellent pastoral care in school and in the boarding community. Health, welfare and safety procedures are good. Pupils have a sense of the natural world and the spiritual dimension in a school with a Christian ethos. Their behaviour is excellent, they show respect for each other and co-operate well. They have a sense of what is fair and just but some do not fully understand how the sanctions system works. The school encourages pupils to take on roles of responsibility, which pupils embrace enthusiastically. They are happy and thoroughly enjoy their time in the school. Their awareness of those less fortunate than themselves is indicated by their enthusiastic commitment to fund-raising for charities at home and overseas.
- 2.3 The aims of the school are promoted successfully by the governing body, which is committed to the academic and personal development of pupils. The governors have a clear oversight of the school, informed by comprehensive reports from the headmistress. A strategic development plan is in place. The governors have responded well to the recommendations of the last report to implement a teaching policy, to identify and share good practice, to encourage longer term curriculum planning and extend the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning. Leadership and management are dynamic and forward-looking, with robust policies and procedures that support pupils effectively in their development. The school recognises that the system for pupil progress profiles is not yet complete, and that whole school marking and assessment could be improved. An error initially found in the centralised register has now been fully addressed. The school promotes excellent links with parents, whose replies to the pre-inspection questionnaires were highly favourable.

## **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:

- ensure that the safeguarding policy is fully implemented on all occasions;
- carry out all necessary recruitment checks before appointments are confirmed and enter their completion on the single centralised register [Regulations 4.(2)(a) ; 3.(2)(b)].

2.5 At the time of the final team visit, the school had rectified the above shortcomings, as noted in the text of the report.

### **(ii) Recommended action**

2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Implement fully the whole-school marking policy and complete the implementation of a tracking system to monitor pupils' academic performance and progress.
2. extend the enrichment programme at sixth form level and promote the provision of activities for the most able pupils;
3. in EYFS develop practical activities which will allow children to solve problems and to become independent learners;
4. develop outdoor play in EYFS to provide a greater range of well planned learning opportunities for children.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

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

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements is good overall and outstanding in some areas. The pupils are well educated from the EYFS to the Sixth Form, and their success in academic achievements at every level successfully reflects the school's declared aims. Each girl is challenged to do her best and to be creative. The well-balanced curricular and extra-curricular opportunities offer breadth and enjoyment. The school's atmosphere and ethos encourage pupils to flourish in a community to which they contribute greatly. Girls throughout the school achieve good levels of knowledge and understanding in their curriculum subjects, and these are often high in relation to their abilities. They are eager, well-motivated learners who work easily in pairs, groups or individually. They help each other and ask for guidance readily. The school has made considerable investment in ICT and girls are growing in confidence in their use of it for homework, in lessons and for research.
- 3.2 The ability profile in the Pre-prep, Prep and Senior School from Years 7 to 11 is above the national average. The ability profile of the Sixth Form is similar to the national average for students taking A-level courses. Results in nationally standardised assessment tests at the age of 7 and 11 over the last three years have been high when compared to the national average for pupils in all maintained schools; results have been particularly high in writing and mathematics. Results in GCSE and A-level examinations over the last three years for which nationally comparative data are available have been high when compared to the national average for girls in all maintained schools. Progress at ages 7 to 11 is good in English but a little below reasonable expectations in maths and science. Pupils make exceptional progress to GCSE in relation to their ability level. The IGCSE science results in the last two years have been below the national average. The school is aware of this and is taking steps to address it. The progress of pupils in the Sixth Form studying for A levels is good. Pupils proceed to higher education, many gaining places at top universities.
- 3.3 Some pupils achieve high performance levels in individual activities and team competitions, such as music and verse speaking examinations and at county level lacrosse. As a result of the close monitoring and support they receive, all pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) and English as an additional language (EAL) achieve well in relation to their abilities. Gifted and talented pupils are given extension work in class and for homework; they are entered early for examinations where appropriate and in the Prep department they have the opportunity to attend a Challenge club. However, these pupils would benefit from further challenges outside the classroom.
- 3.4 The pupils' successful achievement is supported by their excellent attitudes to learning, their exemplary behaviour and the very positive relationships they enjoy between themselves and with staff. They are sensitive to each other's feelings. Their creativity is particularly strong as evidenced in art displays around the school, dance, music and drama lessons. They are orally confident and articulate. They write accurately in factual tasks and creatively and fluently in imaginative tasks. They are numerate and apply their skills to real life situations. Pupils are well motivated, hard-working, willing to participate and show a love of learning and commitment to their studies.

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

- 3.5 The school offers a broad, balanced and flexible curriculum which supports its aims to provide a high quality learning environment and to provide equal access to opportunities. The Prep and Pre-prep curriculum is suited to all ages, abilities and needs. It covers all the required subjects, including an effective personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. French is part of the provision from Year 2 and religious studies (RS) from Year 3. The introduction of the Accelerated Reader programme in 2008 for Years 3 to 6 has encouraged a positive reading culture throughout the Prep school. Allocation of periods for science in Years 3 to 6 has been increased to three periods since the last inspection allowing more time for investigative work. The curriculum offered provides a broad and rich education experience. Expressive subjects are well represented. Pupils have many creative opportunities. Pupils benefit from a wide range of option subjects at GCSE, and flexible choices in the sixth form. Subjects offered to GCSE include hospitality, catering and statistics. The recently introduced enrichment programme to further sixth form pupils' educational experience provides a firm platform for further development.
- 3.6 The curriculum is planned throughout the school to ensure continuity of education across the years. The school provides well for all its pupils, including those with LDD and EAL. They are provided with individual education plans (IEPs) and extra support sessions, where appropriate, as part of the curriculum. The school's drop in clubs are open to all pupils seeking extra help, not only those who have been identified as needing extra support. Gifted and talented pupils are catered for effectively through setting arrangements and extension tasks. A programme of out-of-school activities is currently being set up to give these pupils opportunities to extend themselves fully. The careers department offers the support pupils need to prepare them for the next stage of their education. Pupils in Year 10 are strongly encouraged to organise their work experience in preparation for their future careers.
- 3.7 The school provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities and visits' programmes which enable pupils to widen and develop their interests. Drama and dance have a high profile. Years 10 and 11 netball squads recently had the opportunity to train with the current England Netball Captain. Pupils' social education is enriched through local community activities. A Year 11 Business Studies group recently visited the Mini factory in Oxford, giving them first-hand knowledge of the manufacturing process. Pupils' aesthetic education is enriched through visitors to the school, such as the pianist Alexander Ardakov who performed in a 'Homage to Chopin' concert. Links with the outside community remain central to the school's ethos of giving back to the less privileged. Pupils are involved in local fund raising, for example, the Simon Community for the homeless. Pupils visit local schools and centres where they become aware of other peoples' lives and the challenges they face. They raise funds for charities of their own choice and on their own initiative. The school has close links with and supports St Mark's school in Uganda. Older pupils have the opportunity to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Pupils have a range of opportunities to extend their awareness of the wider world through trips further afield, such as modern foreign language visits, field trips and annual ski trips.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.8 Stimulating and effective teaching takes place in all parts of the school, some of which is excellent. Pupils are enabled to make good progress in line with the aims of the school. Teachers project subject enthusiasm. They have secure subject knowledge and prepare interesting lessons. In the best lessons teachers maintain a brisk pace, keep their pupils engaged, use good questioning techniques, make good use of resources, challenge their pupils and encourage them to think for themselves. In less successful lessons pupils are not given opportunities to explore their own ideas. Teachers know their pupils well, are aware of their pupils' different needs and give individual help where appropriate. A number of pupil and parental questionnaire responses suggest that there is too much homework. The inspectors found that the amounts are generally appropriate for each age group. Praise is used to good effect and this adds to the pupils' enjoyment of their work. Since the last inspection, opportunities for independent learning have improved; pupils are given responsibility for their own work and opportunities to think and reason for themselves.
- 3.9 Marking and assessment across the year groups and in departments is uneven. At best marking is regular, careful and encouraging of pupils' efforts, with positive, helpful comments pointing the way forward and prompts for improvement. In some subjects, marking is cursory and comments are brief. However, pupils say they are given verbal feedback and know what they have to do to make progress. The volume of work also varies between subjects. A system to centralise pupil progress profiles is currently being set up in order to facilitate pupil tracking.
- 3.10 The classrooms in the prep and senior school are spacious and well resourced. Most have interactive white boards. In a Year 6 science lesson pupils benefited from using the specialised equipment in the laboratory to investigate reversible and irreversible changes. Teachers use resources and materials effectively to engage their pupils. In most lessons teachers use a variety of approaches to make their lessons lively and enjoyable. The library is well stocked, has a range of up-to-date materials, and gives pupils opportunities for their own research.

## **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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

- 4.1 Throughout the school, the quality of pupils' personal development is excellent, promoted by strong relationships within the community and by outstanding pastoral care. Pupils have highly developed personal qualities; they are self-assured, confident and articulate and take a pride in their own and others' achievements.
- 4.2 The pupils are caring and considerate towards others and sensitive to their feelings. They are well aware of the school's Christian ethos. Pupils gain a secure set of moral beliefs and a sense of responsibility from school and chapel assemblies, often conducted by form groups. The girls are awed by their own and others' performance in, for example, dance, drama and music. The school's beautiful location gives pupils an appreciation of the natural world.
- 4.3 Pupils are friendly and outgoing, and their manners and behaviour exemplary. They have a clear sense of right and wrong and respect the school rules. They understand and support the high standards of behaviour that are expected. Pupils appreciate the reward system, which includes the awarding of rosettes and postcards of praise. Some pupils, however, find the sanctions system unclear and therefore do not fully embrace it. Pupils are highly active in charitable work, often through the House system, and a number of projects have raised significant sums of money. Pupils are well aware of the difference their support makes to those less fortunate than themselves.
- 4.4 Pupils are considerate to each other and courteous to their teachers and visitors. They take seriously the wide range of opportunities to take on responsibilities within the school community such as Student Listener, Playground Friend, representative on the Boarders' Council, Eco or Food committees. All roles offer the girls a chance to develop their leadership skills and show initiative. The Prefect and House teams function effectively and have a major role supporting the staff and reinforcing the value of the school community. The prefects are responsible for ensuring everyone is seated for whole school assemblies. Pupils are elected by their peers to the Prep and Senior school councils, enabling them to take responsibility for representing opinions and ideas. In all parts of the school, the girls work extremely well together in lessons, and relate positively to one another. They celebrate and delight in their own and others' successes. Pupils' sense of belonging is enhanced through whole-school assemblies. Through PSHE lessons pupils are able to appreciate the contribution which organisations such as local councils make to society. In a Year 6 lesson the issue of cyber bullying was confidently and effectively acted out in short scenarios by the girls. Older pupils take an interest in current affairs and how laws are made. The younger pupils' awareness of current affairs is raised through the general knowledge quiz in the weekly newsletter. Work experience, promoted by the school, also prepares pupils effectively for the next stage in their education. In the pre-inspection questionnaire pupils expressed appreciation of the role they can play in the life of the school.

4.5 The girls are highly supportive of each other, whatever their beliefs and cultural background. The older pupils value the opportunity to become confirmed and candidates clearly appreciate the support of the School Chaplain. They have a valuable understanding of cultural diversity from their RS work on alternative faiths, cultures and traditions; a visit from a holocaust survivor gave the girls a very important perspective on such a sensitive topic. They develop their understanding of other cultures in subjects such as geography, history and music as well as a strong awareness of their own culture through visits to museums, theatres and other places of cultural interest.

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

4.6 The pastoral care provided for all pupils throughout the school is excellent. The school encourages consideration for others, understanding, self-discipline and courtesy. The staff provide outstanding support and guidance through the roles of class and subject teachers and in the boarding houses. Pastoral arrangements are highly effective in fostering pupils' personal development and academic achievement. Pupils are happy, help each other and feel valued and cared for. They have a sense of responsibility. Pupils believe the rules are fair. A new system of rewards and sanctions has been introduced as yet not fully understood by all pupils. In the pre-inspection questionnaire a number of pupils expressed the view that the school does not always listen to their views and respond to their concerns. The inspectors found that this is not the case; a variety of channels exist to ensure their voices are heard. All staff promote the self-confidence of pupils over a range of activities through praise and encouragement. Pupils have the confidence to turn to adults in case of need. An effective induction process is in place for new pupils.

4.7 Relationships between pupils and staff and pupils themselves are extremely strong, promoting a caring, friendly atmosphere throughout the school. Staff know their pupils well and this helps to create a happy caring environment in which pupils thrive. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. A very effective "Apricot" communication system, of the school's own design, enables speedy following up and recording of any pastoral issues. Pupils say bullying is rare, and agree that staff deal with any difficulties constructively. House activities reinforce a sense of identity. Since the last inspection a re-structuring of the pastoral leadership programme has enabled Heads of Year to monitor and support pupils more effectively.

4.8 The safeguarding of pupils is satisfactory; all staff are trained. There is a good relationship with the local authority safeguarding team. At the time of the first visit the school did not fully comply with the regulations to verify references when recruiting staff. Procedures now fully meet the regulatory requirements.

4.9 Measures are taken to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards; regular fire drills are held and staff receive fire training. Health and safety procedures are effective, with risk assessments covering all aspects of school life. A health and safety committee meets regularly to discuss any matters arising. Health and safety procedures are effective.

- 4.10 Electrical testing is appropriately carried out and health and safety documentation is thorough. Accidents are suitably recorded and facilities for those who become ill during the school day are good. An attractive medical room serves the needs of the whole school, including boarders. An accessibility plan is in place to improve the educational provision for those pupils with disabilities. Pupils understand the importance of choosing a healthy diet and participating in physical exercise. They enjoy school meals which are nutritious and provide choice. The admission and electronic attendance registers are accurately maintained and stored.

#### **4.(c) The quality of boarding education**

- 4.11 The boarding experience plays a valuable part in the pupils' education and development. It contributes effectively to the school aims to provide a structured environment based on mutual respect in which self-esteem and confidence are encouraged. Flexi-boarding offers pupils the opportunity to join the boarding community for short periods of time. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents and pupils overwhelmingly endorsed the outstanding boarding provision. Relationships between pupils and between staff and pupils within the boarding community are excellent. Younger boarders are able to communicate well with senior boarders. The recent introduction of House leadership and representation by pupils provide structure in the boarding community. Issues raised by boarders at the Boarders' Council meetings are taken up by the boarding staff. A wide range of activities is planned at the weekend, tailored to suit the wishes of boarders. They are able to take advantage of the school's excellent facilities, such as the swimming pool.
- 4.12 The accommodation is comfortable, well-furnished, spacious and attractive. Boarders can prepare their own snacks. All boarders have access to computers. Sixth form boarders are given more independence to help them prepare for life beyond school. The small number of boarders and high staff ratios create a family atmosphere where girls feel well cared for in a secure, 'second home' environment. The school has met the recommendations set out in the previous boarding inspection report.



## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

5.1 The quality of governance is good. The governing body oversees the work of the school and helps to secure its aims, which strongly support pupils' personal and academic development. Through the committees, including the Education Committee, established since the last inspection, the governors keep abreast of their responsibilities to uphold high educational standards. They offer a wide range of expertise, are well informed and make a very positive contribution to the work of the school. A comprehensive, strategic development plan is in place. Governors recognise the need for a programme of training to respond the demands of their role. In line with the recommendations from the last inspection report, the governors have overseen the implementation of a teaching policy, increased opportunities for the identification and sharing of good practice, encouraged longer-term curriculum development by the academic committee and extended of the use of ICT in teaching and learning. The governors are highly effective in financial planning which has led to the recent completion of a substantial building programme. They provide and maintain high quality accommodation, and ensure that material and human resources are used to best advantage to meet the needs of the pupils. Governors receive regular comprehensive reports from the headmistress, which include contributions from all departments, and which give insight into the successes and challenges of the whole school. At the time of the initial inspection the governors' oversight and monitoring of the undertaking and recording of recruitment checks had not been sufficiently rigorous. The appropriate procedures now in place ensure that the school fully meets the requirements.

### **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management**

5.2 Leadership and management are good, and in line with the aims of the school to encourage excellence and provide a learning environment of high quality in which each girl is challenged to do her best. The headmistress has overall responsibility for the school, which she shares with the senior leadership team. The day to day running of the Pre-prep and Prep departments is delegated to the head of the department. Clear educational direction is provided at all levels, as reflected in the pupils' excellent achievements and personal development. The roles of senior management are clearly defined, their leadership style dynamic and forward-looking. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure the effective oversight and monitoring of pastoral and academic matters. Regular meetings ensure an integrated approach between the academic and pastoral teams. Staff at all levels are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process for the school's development. A detailed development plan, to which all departments contribute, sets out specific short, medium and longer term areas for educational improvement. The school is in the process of setting up a centralised system to record pupils' data, which will further inform planning.

- 5.3 Teaching staff are deployed effectively throughout the school, as are classroom support staff in the EYFS and Pre-prep department. All contribute significantly to pupils' learning and welfare, including pupils with LDD, with EAL and gifted and talented pupils. High quality staff are appointed and staffing levels are excellent, enabling strong support to be given to pupils throughout the school. In-service training and performance review are regular features of staff development, and the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of the pupils are given a high priority, with all staff trained in these areas. Non-teaching staff make a significant contribution to pupils' personal and academic development through their support roles within the school community. At the time of the initial inspection the centralised register was not fully compliant. Procedures for staff recruitment, including the verification of references, for all staff are now firmly in place to ensure that the school meets fully the regulatory requirements.

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

- 5.4 The quality of links between the school and parents is excellent and has improved since the last inspection. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicate that parents feel they are encouraged to be involved in the life and work of the school. They are very satisfied with the information received about their daughter's progress, and are aware that policies and procedures are readily available. Parents appreciate, in particular, the pastoral care and the help and guidance offered. They are very satisfied with the high standards of behaviour and the positive attitudes which the school promotes. They appreciate the extra-curricular opportunities. Parents are welcomed into the school to see some of the work that is going on in lessons, or to performances and musical recitals. The website is frequently updated and ensures that the majority of parents receive current information. The work of the Fellowship, the parent and teacher association is highly valued by the school and is well supported by the parents. The Cornerstones Alumnae provides continued links with old girls who often send their own children to the school.
- 5.5 Most parents are very satisfied with the information they receive about their children's progress. Parents receive two written reports a year which give a clear indication of progress and set meaningful targets. In addition to the report system, parents are invited to attend up to two parents' evenings a year. Parents and prospective parents receive all relevant information about the school. A termly newsletter and weekly bulletin highlight for parents events and the successes of pupils both in and out of school. The introduction of Parentmail and various initiatives, such as the Board of Excellence in the Prep department and "The work of the week" book in the Pre-prep department have enhanced parental links. The information evenings held for the older girls and their parents regarding topics such as binge drinking and internet safety have been well received.
- 5.6 In the pre-inspection questionnaire most parents agree that they can communicate easily with the school and receive timely and well handled responses to their concerns, but a number disagree. The inspectors found that the very effective, positive systems the school has in place ensure that parental concerns are dealt with promptly and with due care and attention.

**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 of EYFS is good. Staff provide a welcoming, caring environment in which children make good progress in their learning. They have worked very well to ensure continuity and minimal disruption for the children as a result of staff changes. Children's well-being is central to practice, and each child is treated as an individual. There are effective links with parents, carers and the local authority's inclusion team, to ensure that children are well supported and their needs are identified and met. Following previous inspections, information provided to parents has been improved, as have opportunities for children in the reception class to use computers. The Head of Pre-prep has a good understanding of where further improvement is needed and, together with the early years staff, is taking effective steps to bring it about. .

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

6.2 The leadership and management of the EYFS are good. The necessary policies and procedures are in place to safeguard children and ensure their needs are met. Regular training is in place to ensure that staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Risk assessments are regularly carried out to ensure that equipment and accommodation are safe for the children. There is a clear drive for improvement led by the Head of Pre-prep, who was appointed at the beginning of the academic year. She has drawn up a development plan to further improve children's learning through practical activities. Assessment has been strengthened to monitor children's progress during their time in the EYFS. Resources have been upgraded and reorganised to provide children with greater choice and independence. Outdoor resources, however, are limited. Few parents responded to the inspection questionnaire, but those to whom the inspector spoke expressed satisfaction with all areas of the Early Years provision.

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

6.3 The overall quality of provision in the EYFS is good. Staffing ratios are high, providing children with good levels of support. Staff encourage children to think and to express themselves, and use praise effectively to increase confidence and motivation. They foster good behaviour by sensitively reinforcing the need for kindness, consideration and following agreed rules. Overall planning ensures a broad and balanced range of experiences across all areas of learning. Healthy eating, regular exercise and reminders about safety are a well-established part of daily routines. Outdoor play is, however, not yet sufficiently well planned to promote children's learning or integrated into the Early Years curriculum.

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

- 6.4 Outcomes for children are good. They are on course to achieve or exceed the early learning goals by the end of the EYFS. Children are confident and enthusiastic learners. They take turns and develop a sense of responsibility as they lead their class into assembly or give out fruit and drinks at snack time. They express themselves clearly, speaking confidently and listening to others. They enjoy books and handle them with care. Children in the Reception class have a good knowledge of initial sounds, which they use to write unfamiliar words, and most are capable of solving simple numerical problems. Children demonstrate good computer skills and express a growing knowledge of the world. Their physical and creative development is supported by specialist teaching for ballet, music, drama, swimming and physical education. .

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

### Inspectors

Mrs Jenny Longbourne	Reporting inspector
Mrs Anne Musgrave	Junior Team Inspector (Deputy Head, IAPS)
Mrs Kate Carey	Junior Team Inspector (Head of School (Prep), GSA )
Mrs Caroline Bateson	Senior Team Inspector (Head, GSA)
Mr Anton Kok	Senior Team Inspector (Director of Studies, HMC)
Ms Alison Horton	Senior Team Inspector (Teacher, GSA)
Ms Anne Culliford	Early Years Lead Inspector

“Pupils have highly developed personal qualities; they are self-assured, confident and articulate and take a pride in their own and others’ achievements.”



“The small number of boarders and high staff ratios create a family atmosphere where girls feel well cared for in a secure, ‘second home’ environment.”

“Relationships between pupils and staff and pupils themselves are extremely strong, promoting a caring, friendly atmosphere throughout the school.”

“Relationships between pupils and between staff and pupils within the boarding community are excellent.”





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