



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

RATCLIFFE COLLEGE

STANDARD INSPECTION

FINAL VISIT

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Ratcliffe College

Full Name of School/College	Ratcliffe College		
DCSF Number	855/6001		
EYFS Number	EY242021		
Registered Charity Number	527850		
Address	Ratcliffe College Fosse Way Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake Leicester Leicestershire LE7 4SG		
Telephone Number	01509 817006		
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Email Address	cgovan@ratcliffe.leics.sch.uk		
Head	Mr Gareth Lloyd		
Chair of Governors	Dr Colin Draycott		
Age Range	3 to 18		
Total Number of Pupils	685		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (399 boys; 286 girls;)		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	3	5-11: 131
	3-5 (EYFS):	31	11-18: 520
Number of Day Pupils	590	Capacity for flexi-boarding:	17
Number of Boarders	Total:	95	
	Full:	92	Weekly: 3
Head of EYFS Setting	Mrs Sarah Rankine		
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection date/EYFS	12 Jan 2010 to 13 Jan 2010		
Final (team) visit	08 Feb 2010 to 10 Feb 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 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.

The inspection of boarding was not carried out in conjunction with the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report can be found 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 Ratcliffe College is a co-educational day and boarding school for 685 pupils aged from three to eighteen. There are 34 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), including sixteen boys and eighteen girls, of whom fifteen attend part-time. The school was founded in 1847 by the Rosminian Fathers, to follow its maxim, "Charity is the fulfilment of the law", in all areas of life. It retains a strong Roman Catholic ethos while welcoming pupils of all faiths and backgrounds. The senior school and the junior department, occupy a 100 acre site with buildings by Pugin. The EYFS is housed in the nursery school. It consists of two Cygnets classes for children aged three to four, and a Reception class called Swans for four to five year olds. There are two boarding houses, one for boys aged ten and above and one for girls of similar age, each accommodated within the main school building. The governing body has oversight of all sections of the school.
- 1.2 The school aims to create a community where each individual is recognised as a unique part of God's creation, nurturing a sense of dignity and self-worth and fostering supportive, caring relationships, to help pupils develop their gifts and talents through a broad and balanced curriculum, to foster intellectual curiosity and academic achievement, and encourage pupils to realise their full potential, and to ensure that staff are aware of the aims and ideals of the school. Since the previous inspection in February 2004, a new sixth form centre has been opened, together with refurbished medical and boarding accommodation, and a new chair of governors and a new head have been appointed.
- 1.3 The average ability of pupils in both sections of the school is above the national average for all maintained schools. The senior school enters pupils for GCSE and A-level examinations. The junior department ceased to enter pupils for national tests in 2009. Nearly all junior department pupils proceed to the senior school and two-thirds of pupils continue into the sixth form. Most who leave go to sixth form colleges or other independent schools. There are 95 boarders in the senior school. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds, including two pupils in the EYFS and 45 in the senior school who have English as an additional language (EAL). One pupil in the senior school has a statement of special educational needs (SEN), and 109 pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), although none is in the EYFS.
- 1.4 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 Pupils achieve good standards at all ages and are highly effective learners overall. They benefit from a wide-ranging curriculum and programme of activities, and from well-planned and effective teaching. They make good progress. The most able pupils generally achieve well and senior managers are implementing strategies to ensure that these pupils achieve their full potential. Pupils excel in working together and their learning is enhanced by the excellent relationships they have with their teachers.
- 2.2 Pupils' personal development is excellent and informed by a strong spiritual dimension. Their behaviour is exemplary. Pupils undertake responsibility with integrity and fulfil it with success. They develop a strong moral code and high levels of self-confidence. The school acknowledges that younger pupils' understanding of public institutions is limited, and that monitoring of their development in this area is not consistent. Pupils support an extensive range of charities with enthusiasm. They show strong cultural awareness, participating in a wide range of activities related to their own and other cultures. In their development, pupils are supported by excellent pastoral care within a nurturing community. Older pupils develop good relationships with younger pupils in both sections of the school. Good arrangements to ensure pupils' welfare and health and safety contribute effectively to their care. Arrangements for boarding are excellent and boarders benefit from good quality accommodation. Pupils' responses to pre-inspection questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive about the school, commenting often on its family atmosphere.
- 2.3 Governance is good, and supports the school's aims well, together with the Rosminian principles which inform them. Effective oversight and good planning are combined with realistic financial consideration. Together with senior management, governors identify the school's needs well through good self-evaluation. The school has responded successfully to the recommendations of the previous inspection report. Since then significant progress has been made in the school's curricular provision, the contribution of teaching, and in pupils' achievements and learning. Leadership is strong and management is good. Good policies are introduced at all levels, and implemented successfully overall, with effective monitoring. The school maintains excellent links with parents, who expressed satisfaction, often strongly, with the education provided by the school, in pre-inspection questionnaires.

2.(b) Action points

(i) For the [main] school

(a) Compliance with the Independent School Standards Regulations

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

- 2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended.

(ii) For the Early Years Foundation Stage setting

(a) Compliance with the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements

2.5 The school's provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and no action is required.

(b) Recommended action

2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

1. ensure good practice in offering appropriate levels of challenge to the most able pupils is consistently offered across the subject areas;
2. ensure that the implementation of policy by middle managers is consistent across all subject areas in the senior school.
3. incorporate individual children's 'next steps' into short term planning in EYFS.

THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

Junior Department

- 3.1 Results in national curriculum tests at the age of seven over the last three years for which comparative data is available have been high when compared with the average for all maintained primary schools. Results in national curriculum tests at the age of eleven have been excellent. Pupils in the junior department, including those with LDD, achieve well in relation to their ability. In the areas of literacy and the development of creative skills they sometimes reach excellent standards. More able pupils, and those with particular talents, generally achieve well. They make particularly rapid progress in response to tasks adapted to suit their needs, for example in a science lesson for younger pupils, where more able pupils identified characteristics of materials in greater depth when given their own set of samples with which to experiment. All pupils develop knowledge, skills and understanding in all subjects well. They are highly articulate, and confident in their use of language. Their reasoning skills are good and pupils communicate independent ideas highly effectively. Pupils' numeracy skills are good. They use information and communication technology (ICT) efficiently.
- 3.2 Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They work well independently in class and in homework tasks. They work together, in pairs and teams, highly successfully, listening to each other's views carefully and sensitively, for example in an assembly on appreciating the qualities of others. Pupils have excellent relationships with staff. They concentrate well, and show great application in lessons and in activities. They achieve well in activities, including winning county competitions in hockey and achieving high standards of choral singing.

Senior School

- 3.3 Results in GCSE and A Level over the last three years for which comparative data are available have been high in comparison with the national average for all maintained schools. Pupils make good progress over time in relation to their ability. Pupils, including those with EAL, achieve well in all subjects and some achieve excellent standards in class. Pupils' achievements have improved significantly since the previous inspection. More able pupils make rapid progress in those subjects which give stimulating tasks to challenge them, for example in mathematics and chemistry lessons for younger pupils, and in English in the sixth form, but this is not consistent in all subjects. Those with LDD generally achieve well. Pupils develop good knowledge, skills and understanding. At all ability levels pupils are highly articulate. Their reasoning skills are well developed and, in the best lessons, when challenged to think more deeply, their reasoning is excellent. Pupils' mathematical skills are good and used effectively in other subjects. They use ICT highly effectively in some areas, particularly the creative arts, but their use of it in other subjects is mainly as a research tool.
- 3.4 Working together is a strength of the school, and pupils demonstrate their ability to do so with great success frequently, especially in sports, music and staged productions. Pupils are highly effective learners overall and many are enthusiastic

about their learning. They have excellent listening skills. They enjoy researching independently and do so well. Relationships with staff are excellent. Pupils work hard and show good focus in lessons and in activities. They achieve well in a wide range of activities, including in rugby competitions at county level and, as individuals, in a range of sports at national level including squash, cross-country running, roller hockey and go karting. They also enjoy success in national public speaking competitions, music and drama groups, and in cookery. They achieve consistently well in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DoE), including a good proportion at gold level, and in the combined cadet force (CCF).

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

Junior Department

- 3.5 The broad and balanced curriculum is well designed to reflect the aims of the school. It has developed significantly since the previous inspection, particularly in the balance between subjects, successfully addressing the recommendation of the last report. The curriculum is suited to all ages and includes a good quality personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme. The development of literacy and numeracy are at its core, and the curriculum is enhanced by specialist teaching in French, physical education (PE), music and swimming and, in addition, in Year 6, in science, art and design. Good quality schemes of work are devised, implemented and monitored by subject coordinators. The curriculum includes good arrangements for transition between different stages of pupils' education. Information on pupils joining Year 1 from the EYFS is transferred effectively and the needs of any who have not yet achieved all the Early Learning goals are addressed well. Pupils in Year 6 are prepared to move to the senior school with confidence.
- 3.6 The results of standardised tests taken on entry to the school are used to identify pupils' potential and needs. Those with LDD are given suitable individual plans. The needs of more able pupils and those with particular talents are identified appropriately, and arrangements exist to monitor progress through further assessment. Individual needs are met through grouping by ability in literacy and numeracy with responsibility for further levels of challenge given to class teachers. Classroom assistants are assigned effectively to those pupils or groups that need additional support.
- 3.7 A good range of activities, with a particular emphasis on sport, is available for all pupils. They are encouraged to join at least one activity each week. Participation is monitored and recorded, and reported on to parents. There are a limited number of activities linked to areas of the curriculum which offer some opportunities for more able pupils with particular interests. Every year group enjoys at least one trip or visit annually, with residential trips for older pupils. Visiting speakers add breadth and diversity to the curriculum. Pupils play an active part in community life. The choir performs locally, and local groups visit the school for concerts and other events. There are good links with a Rosminian School in Tanzania through electronic communication and letter-writing. Pupils raise funds for both local and international charities.

Senior School

- 3.8 A broad and balanced curriculum supports well the school's aim to develop pupils' gifts and talents and has been developed significantly since the previous inspection. It is outlined in good quality schemes of work. The core curriculum in Years 7 to 11 supports all areas of learning well, and a good range of options are offered at GCSE and A level. A comprehensive framework for PSHCE is delivered through fortnightly lessons. Citizenship is covered well from Year 9 to the sixth form, although opportunities for younger pupils to develop understanding of public institutions are limited in scope. Careers education is excellent, with termly advice given to younger pupils through PSHCE, and more intensively to older pupils. Pupils are encouraged to take a period of work experience at the end of Year 11 and often apply to do so, although not all can be accommodated by the employers who are asked to provide these placements.
- 3.9 Pupils with LDD or EAL are identified effectively. They are given support within the timetable in groups, but the large size of groups limits detailed individual help. The school assists pupils in obtaining further individual tuition. The needs of pupils with SEN are met well. Appropriate arrangements exist for more able pupils and those with particular talents to be identified. Responsibility for offering them suitable levels of challenge in lessons rests with heads of department, but their progress is not yet monitored consistently.
- 3.10 An excellent range of extra curricular activities extends into the early evening. Pupils appreciate the wide range of activities offered. Good numbers participate in the DoE Award scheme and a thriving CCF, sport, drama and music follow well-developed programmes. Pupils' involvement is monitored, and reported on to parents. Those with particular talents are stimulated by academic and aesthetic clubs. The school has a wide range of strong community links at home and abroad, with charitable work having a particular emphasis. The Mother Teresa group collects and sort clothes for local charities for the homeless, and sixth form pupils visit a local club for adults with learning difficulties. Pupils take part in many outside visits through sporting, cultural and aesthetic activities, including trips abroad, and these complement the curriculum well.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.11 Teaching in both sections of the school is good. It is consistently well-planned and is sometimes of excellent quality. Teachers know their pupils well and show good awareness of their needs. They address them sensitively and effectively in nearly all lessons. Those pupils with EAL or LDD feel that they are usually well supported in their learning. However, some senior school pupils with LDD feel that, in some lessons, they make slower progress when their needs are not fully addressed. The effective information about these pupils' needs supplied to all staff is not acted upon consistently in all teaching. In some lessons, teaching offers excellent levels of challenge in written tasks for more able pupils and those with particular talents. This enables them to make rapid progress, but is not provided in all teaching. All teaching offers good opportunities for oral responses from pupils of all abilities.
- 3.12 Teaching employs a good variety of teaching methods and stimulating tasks for pupils, and is well-paced. In a few lessons where teaching lacks imagination or moves slowly, opportunities for pupils to make progress are more limited. In the best lessons, well-chosen activities allow pupils to make rapid progress by making their own choices. In literacy in the junior department younger pupils choose from a variety of resources, including ICT, musical instruments and books, to help them tell stories, to excellent effect. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and in some cases,

excellent. Teachers have high expectations of pupils which often enables them to make rapid progress in developing their understanding. Many lessons encourage pupils to work collaboratively to good effect, as in music, where younger pupils in the senior school make good progress in creating joint compositions when working in pairs. A spirit of mutual respect and trust exists between staff and pupils which facilitates highly effective learning.

- 3.13 Teaching is well supported by a range of resources which are used effectively, including ICT. Pupils in history in the senior school are enabled to develop their understanding through creating presentations using interactive whiteboards, but opportunities for pupils to use ICT in subject-specific ways in lessons are not always given consistently across subjects. The recommendation of the previous inspection to develop the library further to support pupils' individual study and research across the curriculum has been met well. The school library is a good resource for study and includes a good stock of fiction and non-fiction books. The sixth form centre offers older pupils excellent additional facilities for independent study which they use well.
- 3.14 Marking is regular and provides helpful, constructive advice, although departmental guidelines are not always followed consistently in all subjects. Pupils comment that they understand the way in which their work is marked and what they need to do to improve. They are highly appreciative of the valuable advice they receive on how to develop their learning further, including frequent use of target-setting. In both sections of the school, information provided by standardised tests successfully informs the monitoring of pupils' progress.

3. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The pupils' personal development is excellent. They flourish within, and play a significant part in creating, the strong sense of community which lies at the heart of the school's ethos. Pupils reach very high levels of spiritual awareness. Younger pupils in the senior school demonstrate, for their age, good understanding of complex theological issues. The pupils' behaviour at all ages is outstanding. The school's aim to nurture in each pupil a sense of dignity and self-worth results in high levels of self-esteem. Pupils relish the many opportunities for sporting and aesthetic performance they are given and develop high levels of confidence through their participation. The many cultures represented in the school, particularly in boarding, are a significant factor in the development of tolerance and openness which are characteristics of pupils' approach to life. In all areas of school life pupils readily celebrate each other's successes. They develop a strong moral code. Junior department pupils discuss issues of right and wrong with confidence. Younger pupils in the senior school write perceptively about slavery. Older pupils initiate moral debates in response to contemporary natural disasters, whilst at the same time setting up school-wide fundraising activities to aid victims. Environmental societies and pupils' experience in PSHCE lessons broaden their moral sense well.
- 4.2 Opportunities for responsibility throughout the school enhance pupils' excellent social development. They flourish as members of school councils, societies dedicated to social care and fundraising and, when older, as prefects or 'student listeners' for younger pupils. Pupils establish strong, supportive relationships with each other and with adults. In the junior department, including in EYFS, clear codes of conduct and high expectations result in excellent behaviour. Older pupils develop an effective understanding of public institutions, but the understanding of pupils below Year 9, including in the junior department, is limited, and the school's monitoring of their development in this area is not yet consistent. The school acknowledges this and the programme is under constant review. Charitable work is a strong feature of school life, in accordance with the founding principles of the school. Each year group in turn nominates a charity for whole school fundraising and a wide range of causes receive support, with regular visits by speakers to talk about individual charities and their work. In addition pupils give active support to Rosminian schools in Tanzania and India.
- 4.3 Pupils develop strong cultural awareness through their ready enjoyment of productions, such as an annual event involving all pupils in Year 7. Year 9 pupils write and perform pantomimes, the most successful of which are performed to pupils in the junior department. High quality art created by pupils, including lively and colourful graffiti-inspired works, is displayed in both sections of the school. Pupils visit European countries to enhance their linguistic and cultural understanding, and also on pilgrimage. A large number of pupils perform successfully in a wide range of activities, including instrumental performance and dance, and thriving choirs in both sections of the school.

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

- 4.4 Pastoral care of pupils is excellent and fully supports the school's aims of fostering supportive relationships. All staff, including in EYFS, provide highly effective support and guidance for pupils both within and outside lessons. They give freely of their time to help and support pupils, who appreciate this greatly. Both day and boarding

pupils say they feel cared for and valued as individuals. Throughout the school, pastoral arrangements are highly effective and monitored well, and lines of communication and responsibility are clear and well understood. In the senior school, heads of year and form tutors are the key figures in pupils' care, and their roles have been given increased definition and importance since the last inspection. They also exercise effective oversight of pupils' academic progress and attainment. Within the junior department, class teachers are primarily responsible for pupils' pastoral care and pupils feel that any problems they may have are quickly and effectively addressed.

- 4.5 Relationships between pupils are strong and supportive. An outstanding sense of community permeates the life and work of the school. The system of 'student listeners' is highly valued by pupils. The school has a strong culture of praise and conspicuous efforts are made to recognise and reward good behaviour and effort, including through successful merit and commendation award schemes. The school's code of conduct is clear and effective and puts appropriate emphasis on the encouragement of positive behaviour. Appropriate sanctions exist for unacceptable behaviour, and pupils comment that discipline is generally enforced fairly, effectively and proportionately. Pupils have the opportunity to voice their views through a system of school councils which operate highly effectively. The school has a good anti-bullying policy and pupils are confident that any issues which may arise are dealt with quickly and effectively.
- 4.6 Safeguarding arrangements are good. Appropriate training is given to all staff, including those with specific responsibilities, and procedures are clearly understood. Senior pupils with positions of responsibility are also given appropriate training. There is a designated governor with specific responsibilities regarding child protection. Access for those with physical or learning needs is effectively planned for. Registration of pupils is methodical and absence is followed up quickly. The school maintains an appropriate admissions register. Suitable arrangements exist for pupils who feel unwell, including for boarders, and these are operated sensitively, in conjunction with a good first aid policy. Measures to prevent risks of fire and other hazards are good, as are arrangements for health and safety on educational visits.
- 4.7 The school works hard to encourage pupils to eat healthily. The catering department aims to provide a balanced diet, including for boarders, and pupils praise the quality and variety of the food. The tuck shop and vending machines supply a range of healthy snacks, although other items are also available. There are ample opportunities for pupils to engage in physical exercise and they make good use of these.

4.(c) The quality of boarding education

- 4.8 The quality of boarding education is excellent. The recommendations made in the most recent report by Ofsted have been fully implemented. Boarders benefit from the warm family atmosphere which prevails across the school. Boarding is informed by and strengthens considerably the Catholic ethos of the school, whilst being highly inclusive in approach. Relationships between different age groups within the boarding houses are excellent and staff are both supportive and encouraging. There is good communication between boarding staff and pupils' form tutors who have oversight of their academic and pastoral development. The programme of activities for boarders has been extended recently and offers a good range of opportunities in the evening and at weekends. Pupils are fully involved in making suggestions to enhance this programme. There are excellent opportunities to use school facilities,

such as the sixth form centre and library, in the evening. The boarding council allows boarders good opportunities for their voice to be heard. Representatives are articulate in their views, communicate the views of their peers well, and their suggestions are considered effectively by the school. Boarding accommodation is of a high standard and is comfortable and practical. An excellent recent initiative has created a small flat where groups of sixth form boarders live independently for a two week period, cooking and keeping house for themselves. Boarders enjoy this experience and feel they gain much from it.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

5.1 Governance is good, and supports the school's aims well. The governing body, appointed by trustees from the Rosminian order, includes a good range of experience in financial, legal and accommodation issues. It also benefits from the membership of governors with experience in both junior and senior age education. Its effectiveness has been strengthened by recent revision of its committee structure. This has consolidated governors' oversight of areas where they have legal responsibilities, which they exercise appropriately. In addition to child protection, there is a governor with specific responsibility to liaise over issues of health and safety. The school buildings are maintained well. Governors receive good information regarding the school's activities and they visit the school regularly. Planning is characterised by a strong vision for the school's future, both in terms of its Catholic ethos and its educational development. It is informed by effective and realistic financial consideration.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

5.2 Leadership is strong and management is good. The aims of the school are met well. Pastoral management is excellent at all levels, including boarding, contributing much to pupils' personal development. Academic management is highly effective overall at senior level, and throughout the junior department. Management of departments in the senior school lacks consistency between subjects. There are good links between the junior department and senior school. The senior management team has been strengthened since the last inspection by the introduction of representation from the junior department. The recommendations of the last report with regard to ensuring that staff have adequate time to develop management roles in the junior department have been met well. The needs of the school are identified well through effective self-evaluation, and good quality policies are initiated to meet them. These give effective guidance, and are implemented and monitored effectively in the junior department and in most, but not all subjects in the senior school. Careful financial planning ensures that pastoral and academic areas of school life receive good resources.

5.3 The school secures well-qualified and dedicated staff who contribute much to the sense of community central to the school's ethos. Recent appointments to senior management positions have contributed additional strengths to this level of management. A good system of staff review has been introduced which meets the recommendation of the last inspection successfully. This leads to regular training of staff which is well-designed to address the school's needs academically, and in the areas of pupils' welfare, health and safety. Checking procedures to ensure the suitability of staff, volunteers and governors to work with children are robust, and the central register is maintained effectively. The school's sense of community is further enhanced by the effective work of secretarial, administrative and other non-teaching staff who show clear concern for pupils' well-being.

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

5.4 The school maintains excellent links with parents. Responses to pre-inspection questionnaires indicate that parents are satisfied, often highly, with the education

and support that their children receive. They show particularly high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and curriculum provided; the range of activities on offer; and pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Many parents comment positively about the support afforded to pupils with LDD, although some feel that the excellent quality support given in designated sessions is not always followed up consistently in the classroom. Parents feel that the school is highly successful in promoting worthwhile views, leading to high standards of behaviour amongst pupils. Parent's views of boarding provision are extremely positive.

- 5.5 Parents are regularly provided with good quality information about pupils' progress through helpful and informative reports. These are sent to parents twice-yearly, with additional half-termly progress grades in the senior school. Parents are invited to respond in writing to comments to the report. Consultation evenings are held in both sections of the school during the year. Heads of year and form tutors provide a regular, informal conduit of communication with parents, including through homework planners.
- 5.6 The school actively encourages parental involvement through a series of talks and briefings, including a start of year reception, and a newly initiated parents' forum, at which senior staff and parents gather to discuss matters of common interest. There is a thriving parents' association which organizes and supports a wide variety of social activities. It promotes fund-raising to support the school's charitable work, and to finance additional facilities. Parental attendance at a wide range of school events, including sports fixtures, plays, concerts and services, is warmly encouraged, with family fun days organised specifically for the families of boarding pupils. Such events have a warm, family atmosphere. Parents of pupils in the junior department are invited to join their children at a weekly assembly. The weekly E-Newsletter to parents is informative and greatly appreciated.
- 5.7 Parents of current and prospective pupils are provided with required information about the school and parents generally consider school documentation to be of high quality. The school regularly canvasses the views of parents through questionnaires. It has recently introduced a weekly electronic newsletter which informs parents of forthcoming events and celebrates pupils' achievements. The school has in place a suitable complaints policy, although this has not needed to be invoked recently. Parents consider that the school deals well with their concerns.

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

5. 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 the setting is outstanding in meeting the needs of children and fulfilling both the whole school's aims and its own dedicated aim of valuing each child's past experiences and building on them. It achieves this outstandingly well by providing a high quality, developmentally appropriate curriculum which lays the foundation for children's later learning and also has regard to their present individual needs. All children make rapid progress in their learning, demonstrate outstanding personal development and benefit from well-qualified, knowledgeable, hardworking staff. The outstanding partnership with parents reassures children who quickly develop strong relationships with staff and with each other.

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

6.2 Leadership and management are outstanding because staff work as a team sharing responsibility for continuously improving outcomes for children. The self evaluation shows an excellent understanding of the provision's strengths and weaknesses and sets clear direction for developments within the setting. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents expressed great appreciation of their children's progress and of the nurturing care and support their children receive. Highly effective links with external agencies including the local authority offer additional and valued support for staff, extending the skills and information available to them. There are no breaches of specific requirements and documentation is comprehensive and shows good attention to detail. The recommendation set at the last inspection has been addressed and excellent progress has been made.

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

6.3 The quality of the provision is outstanding. Staff have excellent knowledge of the EYFS framework and work hard to provide a welcoming and stimulating environment where children's welfare is paramount. Staff are warm and enthusiastic promoting an ethos that shows how they value each child as uniquely special. Thorough initial and continuing assessment procedures, based on regular observations, ensure that the next stage of learning for each child is clearly identified, including the setting of suitable targets. These "next steps" are not at present included in written short term planning and the setting acknowledges this as an area for development. An excellent balance of adult led and child initiated activities extend seamlessly from indoors to outside whatever the weather, resulting in active and exploratory learning. The outdoor environment is extensive and well resourced, and provides children with daily opportunities to be adventurous under close adult supervision. There is effective provision for both the early identification of children's special needs and continued support for those needs.

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

- 6.4 For most children, the outcomes are at least good and the majority of outcomes are outstanding. Children make significant gains in their learning and have consistently good and often excellent levels of achievement. Attainment on entry is on average in line with age-related expectations but within that there is a broad spread. By the end of the EYFS most children are on course to achieve the early learning goals in all six areas of learning. Children's behaviour is exemplary and their outstanding personal development is positively influenced by adults who are admirable role models. Relationships are very strong at all levels. Children feel secure in the setting, are very considerate towards each other, learn to share, and form happy friendships. They develop a good awareness of personal safety and comply with the simple rules that relate to this. They display well developed self-help skills, for example knowing they must wash their hands before eating, putting on their own wellingtons and wrapping up warmly to play out of doors. Children enjoy physical activities, acknowledging that exercise and healthy eating will keep their hearts strong. They are prepared well for the next stage in their education and their attitude towards learning is highly positive. Children talk about their activities with great enthusiasm and clarity of expression. They are extremely articulate and their language and numeracy skills are strong. They respond well to praise and encouragement and are happy in the setting, deriving great pleasure from their learning.

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 a governors' representative, 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.

Inspectors

Mr Martin Bussey	Reporting inspector
Mrs Jennifer Morris	Junior Team Inspector (Head, IAPS)
Mr Anthony Clements	Junior Team Inspector (Deputy Head, IAPS)
Mrs Caroline Jordan	Senior Team Inspector (Head, GSA)
Mrs Val Barnes	Senior Team Inspector (Former Head, ISA)
Dr Dominic Lockett	Senior Team Inspector (Head, HMC)
Mr David Forster	Senior Team Inspector (Director of Studies, HMC)
Mrs Felicity Lawson	Early Years Lead Inspector