



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

BLOXHAM SCHOOL STANDARD INSPECTION

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Bloxham School

Full Name of School	Bloxham School		
DfE Number	931/6002		
Registered Charity Number	1076484		
Address	Bloxham School Bloxham Banbury Oxfordshire OX15 4PE		
Telephone Number	01295 720222		
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Email Address	mea@bloxhamschool.com		
Headmaster	Mr Mark Allbrook		
Chairman of Governors	Mr Nigel Bankes		
Age Range	11 to 19		
Total Number of Pupils	432		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (271 boys; 161 girls)		
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	148	Capacity for flexi-boarding: 215
Number of Boarders	Total:	284	
	Full:	217	Weekly 67
Inspection dates	19 Oct 2010 to 20 Oct 2010		
	15 Nov 2010 to 17 Nov 2010		

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection 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 October 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 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, 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.

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

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Bloxham School is a boarding and day school in the village of Bloxham in Oxfordshire. Founded as a grammar school in 1860, the school joined the Woodard Group of schools in 1896. The Woodard Group is a federation of 45 Church of England schools. The school is currently celebrating the 150th anniversary of its foundation. Bloxham is mixed throughout, with 432 pupils aged 11 to 18, of whom 148 are in the sixth form. It has almost equal numbers of boarders and day pupils.
- 1.2 Since its previous inspection in 2006, the school has extended the music school, the art department and the textiles room. It has developed teaching rooms for physical education (PE), upgraded and refurbished all the science laboratories, and built two new squash courts and a computer room for the Lower School.
- 1.3 The ability profile of the school is above the national average. One hundred and twenty-seven pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), twenty-six of whom receive specialist learning support from the school. Two pupils have statements of special educational needs. Pupils come from a wide range of economic backgrounds. The vast majority of pupils are of white British origin, with a few pupils from overseas who speak English as an additional language (EAL).
- 1.4 The school aims to provide an education that is underpinned by clear Christian principles. Pupils are encouraged to set themselves high standards of achievement relative to their ability, and to respect other people, the community and the world in which they live. Through their experience of worship, of theology and of life within the community, pupils are encouraged to come to a greater knowledge of themselves, of others and of God. The school focuses on the achievements and well-being of pupils in their academic and extra-curricular life, extolling family values of support, individuality, responsibility, community awareness and preparation for adult life.
- 1.5 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 table.

School	NC name
First Form	Year 7
Second Form	Year 8
Third Form	Year 9
Fourth Form	Year 10
Fifth Form	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 The quality of the pupils' overall achievement is excellent; their attainment in external examinations and the progress made are good and they achieve outstandingly in their extra-curricular and sporting activities. Pupils' attitude to learning is markedly positive. They work well with each other and develop a very good range of skills that prepare them well for later life. Pupils' achievement is supported by teaching that encourages independence of thought and uses the new challenge grade reporting system, both to inform pupils about progress and guide them to greater success. Pupils' good research skills are enhanced by the quality of the library and by the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. The careers programme, whilst serving pupils well in moving successfully to higher education, is limited in breadth and practical experience.
- 2.2 The excellence of pupils' personal development meets the school's aim of extolling the family values of support, individuality, responsibility, community awareness and preparation for adult life. Pupils are interesting, lively and grounded individuals whose development is enhanced by outstanding pastoral care. The houses are at the heart of pastoral care and reflect the mutually supportive attitudes of pupils. They benefit strongly in their personal development from the support of tutors and heads of houses. Pupils are spiritually aware and socially mature, integrating well with each other. Sixth formers are good role models and support the staff in other pupils' moral and social development by showing younger ones how responsibilities are undertaken. Pupils are vocal about their enjoyment of school life, in particular the strength of community values.
- 2.3 A fundamental school aim is to encourage pupils to set themselves high standards of achievement relative to their ability, and to respect other people, the community and the world in which they live. The leadership group and the governors ensure that this aim is met. The recommendations of the last report have been addressed, although some aspects of careers education and community service are still underdeveloped. The monitoring of regulatory requirements, including those for safeguarding, is good and clearly recorded. Parents are highly supportive of the way in which the school educates their children, remarking particularly on their confidence and academic success. A few parents have concerns about the support of pupils with LDD, but no evidence was found to support this. A few pupils voiced concerns about the school responding to their views, but observation by the inspection team of the good relations between staff and pupils and the unity of the Bloxham community runs counter to this view.

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 met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Encourage greater awareness of career opportunities and work experience for pupils, by developing careers education further.
 2. Ensure that sixth formers have sufficient opportunity for community service in the curriculum and through extra-curricular activities.

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 pupils are very well educated in accordance with the school's aim of developing the talents and ambitions of all, relative to their ability. The pupils' achievements are excellent. They are at least good in academic subjects and excellent in extra-curricular activities, notably sport.
- 3.2 The pupils' speaking and listening skills are excellent. Pupils speak very articulately to their teachers and fellow pupils, and were consistently seen to be willing and thoughtful listeners. Pupils in a study skills lesson expressed their ideas on time management cogently, using appropriate vocabulary. Pupils' written work at its best is well structured and fluent: pupils craft essays well and use correct subject terminology. High levels of creativity are displayed by pupils; excellent examples were seen in textiles, music composition, and design and technology. In a number of subjects, notably geography and mathematics, pupils displayed very well-developed logic and reasoning skills, especially when applied to problem solving. Logic was well applied in pupils' analysis of the historical value of the views of World War One survivors many years after the event. Pupils show good application of mathematics and ICT across the curriculum. In many, but not all areas of the curriculum, pupils are able to develop independence of thought, as in a dyslexia support lesson and research in a geography lesson. Pupils apply themselves and attain highly in physical activity, particularly in team sports. They make enthusiastic use of the library, where they were constantly to be seen reading and researching.
- 3.3 Beyond the academic curriculum the pupils consistently reach excellent levels of achievement in the school's extra-curricular programme, including gaining The Duke of Edinburgh's Award at gold level, Arkwright scholarships and a national award for young engineers. The level of performance in music and drama is very high. In sport, success is excellent, including international recognition in rugby, polo and sailing. Pupils have gained representative honours at regional and county level in hockey, rugby, cricket and cross country. The equestrian team also has competitive success.
- 3.4 Results in public examinations are based on available data for the most recent three years. In GCSE and A-level examinations, results have been good when compared with the national average for pupils in all maintained schools and similar at both levels when compared with the average for maintained selective schools. At GCSE, half of the grades were A* or A, and at A level two-thirds of the grades were A or B.
- 3.5 Pupils make good progress in relation to those of similar ability. Pupils with LDD achieve very well due to the structured programme of support in mainstream lessons and the additional support of the dyslexia classes. Good progress is made by the few pupils with EAL.
- 3.6 Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning, notably in the sixth form. They work very co-operatively and are keen to support each other, as seen in a sixth-form mathematics lesson on differentiation and in PE lessons. The pupils display considerable enjoyment in their lessons and activities. Observation of work books and files confirmed that pupils have developed good habits of organisation and presentation. Pupils are keen to learn new ideas and are prepared to challenge themselves. The conduct of pupils is excellent.

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

- 3.7 The academic curriculum is good and the programme of extra-curricular activities is excellent. The good range of subjects at GCSE and A level ensures that the curriculum meets the school aim to help pupils to develop enquiring minds, acquire knowledge and skills relevant to adult life, and develop personal and moral values. The school constantly monitors the curriculum with the result that curricular changes are already well developed for the next academic year.
- 3.8 The personal, health, social and citizenship education (PHSCE) programme has been developed extensively since the last inspection. The PHSCE scheme now provides a comprehensive programme for pupils of all ages. One of its strengths is the element of thematic PHSCE days which pupils report engage their attention and allow them to delve deeply into a social issue. ICT in the classroom has also improved significantly since the last inspection and is now used appropriately to enhance the curriculum. The school has developed the careers programme for pupils but it does not yet provide appropriately for all ages. The school encourages pupils in Years 11 and 12 to seek opportunities for work experience in the holidays by asking parents and former pupils to provide work experience placements.
- 3.9 The school has continued to develop the provision for learning support in line with its admissions policy. In addition to the specialist support provided for the small number of pupils on the dyslexia course, the school admits pupils who are supported by classroom teachers. Pupils with LDD were seen to receive effective support in lessons. The extension programme for academic scholars, and other gifted and talented pupils, is well structured and provides good enrichment and challenge.
- 3.10 The excellent and recently extended extra-curricular programme enhances the educational provision for pupils. The extensive programme, which includes sport, music, drama, the Combined Cadet Force and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, ensures that pupils are able to develop skills beyond the academic curriculum. Activities ranging from the model railway club and polo to survival cookery enrich the lives of pupils and enable them to take on new challenges. Since the last inspection, the introduction of priority times in the week for extra-curricular activities has enabled pupils to achieve higher levels of performance. The curriculum is enhanced by trips both within the UK and abroad, which include cultural and language experiences and challenge expeditions, as well as sports tours.
- 3.11 With regard to a recommendation in the last inspection report, opportunities for community service for the sixth form are still limited. However, a number of community links provide pupils with the opportunity to take responsibility for voluntary and charity work; for instance, they work regularly in PE alongside pupils with disabilities. Pupils are motivated by visiting speakers to raise funds for charity. Pupils raise large sums and enjoy doing this through such events as The Snow Ball, which they primarily organise. Whilst the school is an integral part of the local community there are limited opportunities for individual pupils, especially sixth formers, to engage directly in voluntary work or community action.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.12 Teaching is good overall and fulfils the school's aim of enabling pupils to acquire values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and qualifications for happy and successful lives. Teaching is authoritative and develops knowledge, understanding and subject skills in the pupils through careful planning, good use of resources and ensuring that pupils are involved in their learning. In over three-quarters of all the lessons observed during the inspection the quality of teaching was judged to be good or excellent.
- 3.13 Teachers have strong subject knowledge, are confident in the classroom and have a clear understanding of the needs of their pupils. Topics and tasks are well chosen and enable the pupils to make good progress regardless of their academic ability. In the lessons observed teachers showed good awareness of the needs of those pupils with learning or language challenges. Equally, teachers provide pupils identified as gifted and talented with extension material and challenge.
- 3.14 Lessons are well planned and were consistently seen to provide pace, variety and challenge, incorporating a very good range of teaching styles. The school has made a strong response in this area to a recommendation at the last inspection. A variety of different methods enables pupils to show initiative and take responsibility for aspects of their own learning. Teachers use ICT confidently, illustrating ideas and concepts with material from the internet. In a sixth-form German lesson, pupils' vocabulary learning was enhanced by the use of keyboards linked to a data projector, and in geography pupils were able to carry out a virtual visit to Antarctica using websites. Apart from ICT, teachers have developed a range of resources, including, for example, very effective use of molecular models in a chemistry lesson, to enhance the learning experience in the classroom. Teachers regularly refer pupils to library resources for independent research. The library's welcoming environment and the support of the librarians enhance independent study and complement teachers' development of subject skills.
- 3.15 Classroom management was excellent in all lessons observed and this fostered an atmosphere of co-operative and supportive learning across the curriculum. The learning environment around the school is greatly enhanced by a number of excellent wall displays of pupils' original art and photography, including a very well-illustrated display of their research on former pupils who lost their lives in the world wars.
- 3.16 Pupils are given an appropriate volume and level of work to complete both in the classroom and for homework. The marking of pupils' work, however, is variable: at its best it is detailed and provides very good feedback to pupils with clear advice on how to improve but this standard was not reached in a minority of lessons. The system of challenge grades, now in its second year of use, was reported by pupils during their interviews with inspectors to have had a positive effect on their progress, with pupils benefiting from clear advice on how to improve and being given a real incentive to have higher expectations of what they can achieve.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The quality of pupils' personal development is excellent. In lessons, during activities, within the boarding house communities and at worship pupils of all ages clearly demonstrate the school's desire that the treatment of others is built on love, care and respect. The school is highly successful in its aim to encourage strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural values.
- 4.2 Pupils' sense of the spiritual is outstanding. Pupils lead house assemblies and communions. They willingly attend the chaplain's daily Pause for Thought lunchtime gathering in the chapel and confirmed that they value this as a time for reflection amidst a busy day. Pupils nominate on the prayer board those who need their prayers, and pupils' written and fine art contributions in the chapel area illustrate their spiritual reflection. Chapel prefects and 'pupil servers' play an important role in chapel life. Pupils at the animal club showed wonder at the intricacy and beauty of creation and the complexity of the natural world.
- 4.3 The pupils' moral development is excellent. Pupils think about the world in which they live, question their own values and ponder their developing role in society. Through the PHSCE programme pupils debate moral issues, such as the purpose of prison. Their behaviour is excellent; they naturally adhere to the school rules. Courteous to staff and caring and supportive of each other, they are also aware of their responsibilities in the wider world. Pupils raised £16,000 through a charity walk for a care home for AIDS orphans in Africa, whilst an ongoing commitment is the sponsorship of eight children from the developing world. Pupils' response to the Haiti appeal was instantaneous. From discussion it is clear that pupils appreciate what they have and believe it is right to support those who are less fortunate.
- 4.4 Pupils have a high level of social development and clearly relish the opportunity to socialise across the year groups. House responsibilities and duties are taken seriously. Pupils play an important role in organising activities such as house dances, table tennis championships and go-karting races. Pupils show a strong understanding of citizenship, for example through their ability to discuss the plight of the Chilean miners or the use of violence in student demonstrations. Pupils animatedly discussed items in a news broadcast shown on the plasma screen in the library foyer. Pupils learn much from working in PE with those from a local special school.
- 4.5 Pupils' cultural development is excellent. They are tolerant and empathetic, and they are sensitive to and respectful of cultural differences. Throughout the school, opportunities for cultural development are wide ranging. Pupils are keen to research and discuss other cultures. In modern languages, for instance, pupils considered life on an Ecuadorian farm and compared international shopping habits. In English in Year 9, a pupil challenged the class with the claims of Scientology and in theology in Year 8, pupils were comparing world religions. Within the boarding houses, pupils from overseas are welcomed and report that they feel part of the whole-school community. Pupils confirmed that exchanges and overseas visits give them first-hand experience of artistic and architectural genres as well as the mores of different cultures.

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

- 4.6 Pastoral care is outstanding, confidently meeting the school's aim of offering a high level of pastoral care to every member of the community. Tutors know their tutees very well and give them strong support in all areas of their school lives. The structure of care has been further refined since the last inspection. House tutor groups remain a strength of the system, with weekly tutor time. Pupils' care benefits from the weekly meetings of the housemasters and housemistresses with their tutors and from the regular meetings of the care group (deputy head, chaplain and counsellor), which each term assesses current issues. The current development of a pastoral database to complement the academic database is indicative of the school's commitment to an equally high standard of pastoral tracking as to academic tracking. The school is strongly committed to supporting and safeguarding its pupils, both in its documentation and in practice. The pastoral handbook is a model of good practice, ensuring all staff are informed of pastoral policies and strategies. The school works effectively with parents in the support of pupils and publishes a wide range of its documentation on the website.
- 4.7 Pupils are very supportive of each other and confirmed in discussion the strength of the anti-bullying culture. This is complemented by the promotion of good behaviour and self-discipline. Serious disciplinary issues are rare but are dealt with in accordance with the disciplinary policy. The quality of pastoral care is reflected in pupils' comments that individual success is strongly promoted. In a small response to the pre-inspection questionnaire some pupils felt that teachers do not treat them equally in terms of rewards and punishments or listen to their views. From discussions with pupils, observation and consideration of the minutes of house councils, inspectors could not endorse this view. Both pupils and parents, in their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, confirmed the range of people with whom pupils can share personal issues. The peer listener scheme is strongly established, with peer listeners, one of whom is always a pupil from overseas, trained by an external agency, given a high profile in school life and supported by staff on a weekly basis. Pupils turn to peer listeners as well as to adults, and the work of the chaplaincy in this regard was strongly endorsed by pupils. Prefects also support pupils and contribute to the school's atmosphere of openness and happiness.
- 4.8 Led by the chaplain as the designated person, the school has a strong culture of safeguarding its pupils with a comprehensive child protection policy, well known by both staff and senior pupils. Staff training in this area is appropriate and up-to-date. Comprehensive documentation underpins the secure system for safely recruiting staff and governors. Health and safety measures, including fire safety, are thorough and well documented. The access plan for those with learning or physical disabilities is up-to-date. Pupils have a good range of choice at meals and confirm that healthy eating is promoted. Inspectors, in dining with pupils, confirmed the quality of the food. The medical centre is well managed and resourced, the staff providing a good quality of medical and pastoral support. Physical exercise is widely promoted and enjoyed through games and physical education. Admission and attendance registers are correctly maintained and stored.

4.(c) The quality of boarding education

- 4.9 A boarding inspection was conducted by Ofsted simultaneously and is the subject of a separate report. The ISI inspection has considered boarding in the whole-school context only. The overall boarding experience is outstanding. Pupils' educational outcomes and personal development are enhanced by the boarding life of the school which meets the aims of providing a warm and friendly environment where they feel secure and happy, and are enabled to develop their talents to the full.
- 4.10 A particular strength is the integration of boarders and day pupils within the boarding structure: each day pupil is a member of a boarding house and many have their own beds. While there is a significant number of full boarders (about fifty pupils stay in school every weekend), many more travel home after Saturday sports fixtures. The Lower School house for Years 7 and 8 is open five nights a week with all pupils travelling home on Friday after chapel. The same integration of day and boarding pupils is not a feature of this house, which instead provides a particularly homely environment and a very caring introduction to boarding for a small number of pupils, where they develop independence and community values. Integration in the Upper School is illustrated by the number of day pupils who remain for prep until 9.00 pm. This means that boarders and day pupils take most meals together. The quality and variety of meals are good with an emphasis on healthy eating and provision for special diets.
- 4.11 In Upper School houses, boarders and day pupils share bedrooms, so those staying regularly have an unusual amount of space. Sixth formers' single accommodation in some houses rivals that of university settings. Bedrooms are well ordered and boarders enjoy personalising their rooms. Whilst boarders value their strong house identity, across the boarding life of the school boarders enjoy positive interactions between year groups and between girls and boys, and they feel they always have someone with whom to discuss concerns. House responsibilities and house prefect roles support personal development.
- 4.12 As a boarding school day operates for all Upper School pupils, extra-curricular activities and sport are part of the whole-school timetable. During prep, boarders have an opportunity to seek advice from teachers and older boarders, and to use facilities to further their academic success. As an example, the library is staffed until 9.00 pm and is well used. After prep boarders socialise informally and enjoy visiting friends in other houses; the sixth form have their own social centre. Excellent relationships between boarders and boarding staff are typified by good humour and mutual respect. A high number of boarding staff have specialised boarding qualifications.
- 4.13 Boarders have access to an extensive range of sporting and leisure facilities. A few parents suggested in their pre-inspection questionnaire that there should be more activities on Sundays, but boarders told inspectors that whilst they enjoy the programme of internal events and external visits at the weekend, they also appreciate the opportunity to relax with less to do on Sunday. Contact with parents is particularly good as many visit the school twice a week to transport their children and most come into the house on those occasions. Housemasters and housemistresses have regular contact with parents overseas. The health of boarders is well managed by the medical centre.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The governing body gives good support to the aims and management of the school. The significant improvement in academic performance since the last inspection and the development of physical facilities are indicative of the effectiveness of the governors' oversight of educational standards, financial planning and investment in staff and accommodation. The governing body gives the school strong support for growth and improvement, but has recently been re-assessing its role and composition to further strengthen this support. A new chairman has taken up post, new governors have been identified for particular skills, and a strategy day in the current term for governors and the leadership group focused on the school's needs for the next five years. Governors' committees inform the work of the full governing body. The education committee takes a keen interest in the results of teaching and learning, requesting reports from heads of department each year covering topics of the committee's choosing as well as public examination performance. Parents, in response to the questionnaire, showed strong support for the governance of the school.
- 5.2 Governors have good insight into the life of the school. The headmaster's reports, the reports of other senior managers and the minutes of the committees are comprehensive and informative. Governors, whilst being supportive, use their knowledge of the school to question and challenge senior management. Governors also attend school events where they meet with staff, parents and pupils. Governors are fully involved in detailed development planning covering all aspects of school life.
- 5.3 The governing body discharges its responsibilities effectively. Pupils' welfare is carefully monitored, as are the procedures for the appointment of all staff, governors and volunteers. A nominated governor is responsible for oversight of the safeguarding of pupils and all governors are involved in the annual review of child protection. School policies are reviewed by the full governing body, but the regularity of this process is not consistent. Health and safety issues are monitored to ensure their effectiveness. Governors' support of the leadership group and the ethos of the school is caring and effective.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.4 The leadership and management of the school are good and strongly support the aim of providing high quality education, underpinned by clear Christian principles. Senior managers oversee very good standards in public examinations, and promote excellent standards in personal development and extra-curricular activities.
- 5.5 The leadership group is effective in ensuring that policies are correctly implemented and that health and safety practices are regularly monitored. It also exercises a high level of care in relation to the safeguarding of pupils, reflected in the strong culture of child protection throughout the school and the boarding houses, reinforced by a high quality of staff training in child protection and health and safety.
- 5.6 Senior managers are fully committed to the Woodard ethos in fulfilling their responsibilities of giving the school clearly focused educational direction, as exemplified in the two strands of self-evaluation and priority setting since the last

inspection. Firstly, the action plan for raising academic standards has been demonstrably effective in the significant improvement in public examination results. Secondly, the equally important development of the pastoral care programme to strengthen further pupils' personal development is seen in the qualities that pupils exhibit. Although senior managers do not stress unduly the Christian principles underpinning development planning, these principles clearly direct the leadership group's vision for the school.

- 5.7 Since the previous inspection pupils' learning and achievement have been enhanced by teaching that enables pupils to take more initiative in lessons and that addresses the needs of those with LDD. The curriculum has been improved by greater use of ICT and by the development of a new programme of PHSCE. The adoption of challenge grade reporting gives parents and pupils clear guidance in reports on pupils' progress and how they can improve their performance. The recommendations in the last report about the development of careers guidance, including work experience, and more involvement for the sixth form in community service have only been partially addressed.
- 5.8 Management of academic departments is very good. Heads of department are fully involved in the development of academic policy and the annual auditing of departmental performance, and contribute well to the support and motivation of staff. The induction programme is thorough, and appraisal, including lesson observation and training needs, is well managed both in departments and on a whole-school basis. Pastoral management is excellent and has well-developed systems for monitoring pupils' personal development. Staff recruitment is managed efficiently, and the procedures for checking all school staff and governors are thorough and very well documented in a single central register.

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

- 5.9 Links between the school and parents are excellent, fulfilling the school's aims of communicating all essential information to parents and thereby enabling the three-way partnership between pupils, parents and the school to be as fruitful as possible.
- 5.10 Although there was a limited response to the parental questionnaire, a high proportion of parents showed their appreciation of the all-round education and support provided for their children. Very few concerns were raised. The inspection team did not find evidence to sustain comments from a few parents that support for pupils with LDD is lacking or that there are insufficient opportunities for parents to become involved in the life of the school.
- 5.11 Communication with parents is a strong aspect of the school. The parents' handbook is comprehensive and welcoming, as are the house handbooks: all provide essential information and answers to questions from parents of both new and current pupils. The school website is developing apace and contains much useful information on school policies, sporting fixtures and venues, up-to-date news and forthcoming events.
- 5.12 Since the last inspection the school has strongly addressed the issue of the quality of reports to parents. The challenge grade system, accessible to parents through their own portal, was introduced in the last academic year. This involves regular assessment by teachers, followed up by the setting of challenging but realistic target grades and specific strategies for pupils to focus upon in order to achieve them. In addition to this regular electronic update and end-of-term reports, parents also have

the opportunity to attend meetings to discuss pupils' progress and these are very well attended and productive. Parents are also encouraged to make additional appointments as necessary.

- 5.13 A good number of opportunities are provided for parents to be involved in and contribute to the wider life of the school. From annual events like the headmaster's garden party and Founderstide to more regular social events, music and drama productions, sporting fixtures and careers events like Futurefocus, parental involvement is high and encouraged at every opportunity.
- 5.14 A very high proportion of parents who responded to the questionnaire appreciate the manner in which their concerns are handled by the school and also with the speed and quality of the response, valuing the availability of email addresses for tutors, heads of houses and teachers. The formal complaints policy, available to all parents and published on the school website, conforms with regulations.

What the school 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 chairman 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 a team of two Ofsted inspectors over three days.

Inspectors

Mr Adrian Underwood

Reporting Inspector

Mr John Cox

Head of Department, HMC school

Mrs Sarah Dawson

Deputy Head, HMC school

Mr Nigel Lashbrook

Headmaster, HMC school