



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**DOWNE HOUSE SCHOOL**

**STANDARD INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Downe House School

Full Name of School	<b>Downe House School</b>		
DfE Number	<b>869/6002</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>1015059</b>		
Address	<b>Downe House School Cold Ash Thatcham Berkshire RG18 9JJ</b>		
Telephone Number	<b>01635 200 286</b>		
Fax Number	<b>01635 202 026</b>		
Email Address	<b>correspondence@downehouse.net</b>		
Head	<b>Mrs Emma McKendrick</b>		
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Richard Parry</b>		
Age Range	<b>11 to 18</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>561</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Girls</b>		
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	<b>28</b>	
Number of Boarders	Total:	<b>533</b>	
	Full:	<b>533</b>	Weekly: <b>0</b>
Inspection dates	<b>12 Jan 2011 to 13 Jan 2011</b>		
	<b>07 Feb 2011 to 09 Feb 2011</b>		

## 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 February 2005.

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.

The inspection of boarding was not carried out in conjunction with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills, 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 refers to an inspection in February 2009 and can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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 Downe House is a selective independent boarding school for pupils aged 11 to 18 and is set in extensive grounds in the village of Cold Ash near Newbury in Berkshire. The school was founded in the home of Charles Darwin in Kent in 1907 and moved to its present location in 1921. A small number of day pupils attend the school. The school's core philosophy has remained unchanged since its foundation and is centred on education being more than academic success. The school aims to develop each pupil as an individual, to embrace new opportunities, and to learn how to deal with the various challenges that life inevitably brings. The boarding ethos is based on building secure happy relationships within a caring and nurturing environment.
- 1.2 The school is administered by a board of governors. Over recent years the school has had an extensive programme of development, building additional boarding accommodation and purpose-built teaching areas including a new sports hall, a new pavilion and artificial pitch, six boarding house extensions and extensions to the sixth form facilities, a performing arts centre, a new administration centre, and a languages resource centre.
- 1.3 The school caters for 561 pupils of whom 533 are full boarders and 28 are day pupils. There are 166 pupils in the sixth form. Pupils attend the school from across Britain but also from abroad, with European countries providing most of the overseas pupils, resulting in a cultural diversity within the school. Most pupils are from professional families with the business sector well represented. The majority of pupils to GCSE are of above, or far above average ability, and very few are of below average ability. In the sixth form, the ability profile remains above the national average but with a wider range of abilities represented. The school has identified 56 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), of whom all have specialist help. There are eighteen pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) and fifteen receive support as appropriate for their stage of acquiring the language.
- 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.

### **Senior School**

School	NC name
Remove (R)	Year 7
Lower 1V (L1V)	Year 8
Upper 1V (U1V)	Year 9
Lower V (LV)	Year 10
Upper V (UV)	Year 11
Lower V1 (LV1)	Year 12
Upper V1 (UV1)	Year 13

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

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

- 2.1 Downe House is a school where the quality of pupils' achievements is outstanding. They make excellent progress and achieve considerable success at GCSE, IGCSE and A level. They go on to achieve places at universities of their choice. They demonstrate exceptional achievement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The pupils have access to an outstanding curriculum, which is often personalised to their talents and interests and is supplemented by many enrichment activities. Outstanding teaching which challenges them and inspires a love of learning is at the heart of the success of the pupils' many achievements and personal development; however, not all teaching reaches this level of success.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is excellent, aided by an organised, calm and intellectually stimulating community. Pupils' spiritual development is good, underpinned by sound moral values. They show excellent levels of social maturity and develop a strong cultural awareness. The pupils benefit from a high quality of pastoral care provided by all members of staff. The outstanding boarding experience contributes significantly to boarders' excellent personal development allowing them to feel happy and secure in school. The school is a community where strong friendships are formed and a good balance of independent and community living is promoted.
- 2.3 The outstanding leadership and management provided by the head and leadership team provide the vision for the school and the support to achieve the clearly defined goals outlined in the strategic development plan. They are supported by an excellent governing body who are well informed on progressive educational thinking. Their oversight of the welfare and safeguarding of the pupils is thorough and efficient. The school has successfully responded to the recommendations of the last report. The school has excellent links with parents, who show a high level of satisfaction with the education and care provided for their daughters in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The pupils expressed their love of their school and an appreciation of their education in the interviews conducted during the inspection. Some concerns were raised by a small number of pupils in their questionnaire responses with regard to the application of sanctions and rewards and the monitoring of their workload but the inspection team found no evidence to support these.

### **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) Recommendation for further improvement**

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
1. Ensure that the best features of outstanding teaching are promoted across all subjects in the school.

### **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 and their learning, attitudes and skills are outstanding. Pupils are exceptionally well educated and the school fully meets its aim to take the pupils on a learning adventure which allows them to develop their full potential. Pupils demonstrate excellent levels of literacy, numeracy and scientific skills and are very confident in the use of information and communication technology (ICT). They combine their good ICT skills very effectively with excellent mathematical skills to present data in presentations in subjects such as geography, design and technology (DT) and history. A high level of thinking skills is applied across all subject areas. They are highly articulate and confident communicators. GCSE pupils in English, working in groups, fully engaged their audience with their clearly defined and well-reasoned arguments when they presented a pretend podcast on twentieth century poetry. They are extremely imaginative and show excellent levels of creativity in art, drama and music, and in their approach to their learning generally. The presentation and organisation of their work in most cases is good or excellent. Pupils regularly win academic prizes at national level in science, art and English essays and poetry. The pupils have accrued a wide range of exceptional success in sports at local, regional and national levels, especially for lacrosse, netball, swimming and gymnastics. The highest grades are achieved in music and drama qualifications and pupils regularly win places in national music and drama groups. Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Young Enterprise schemes is strong with notable levels of success. The majority of pupils go on to their first choice of university.
- 3.2 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2007 to 2009. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Results at GCSE have been far above the national average for pupils in maintained schools and above the national average for pupils in maintained selective schools. Performance in IGCSE Mathematics in 2009 was above international norms and similar to UK norms, where the benchmark is higher. Results at A level have been above the national averages for girls in all maintained schools and girls in maintained selective schools. In 2010 almost all A-level grades were achieved at A\*-B, with many achieving the new A\* grade.
- 3.3 Pupils of all ages show excellent progress. The results at GCSE are high in relation to the ability of the pupils, indicating that their progress in Year 7 to 11 is exceptional when compared with the average for pupils of similar ability. Results at A level are good in relation to the pupils' ability, indicating that their progress through the sixth form is above the average for pupils of similar ability as supported by standardised measures of progress. Pupils with EAL and those with LDD demonstrate similar levels of progress to GCSE and A level. Observation of work and lessons shows that the more able pupils excel in the extended work they are given the opportunity to do.
- 3.4 Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning when they are fully engaged in the lesson. High levels of concentration were observed, and pupils are exceptionally motivated to do their best work. Pupils have high aspirations, and are extremely demanding both of themselves and their teachers. They are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about their learning and in most lessons behaviour is good. On the rare occasions where

concentration levels fall and behaviour is less focused on learning, it is mostly as a result of a lack of challenge and a frustration at the slow pace of delivery. Excellent social skills allow pupils to work well together both in and out of the classroom. They are equally comfortable working independently or in pairs and groups.

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

- 3.5 The curriculum provision of the school is outstanding and it is suitable for all ages, abilities and needs of pupils. The school succeeds in its aim to give the pupils access to a broad range of subjects, and to complement this provision by offering opportunities to learn outside the classroom through an excellent enrichment and extra-curricular programme. A timetable of 57 lessons a week, including Saturday mornings, allows for a personalisation of the timetable to suit individual interests and talents. Pupils can pursue music, dance and drama qualifications and complete prep assignments within their timetabled day. The provision for pupils with LDD and EAL is thorough and appropriate to their needs.
- 3.6 The curriculum is reviewed annually. The core curriculum in Years 7 to 9 gives pupils good opportunity to acquire skills in speaking and listening, numeracy, literacy and ICT and to acquire knowledge in the key subjects of the national curriculum. The wide range of subjects on offer for GCSE, IGCSE and at sixth-form level is one of the strongest features of the curriculum, allowing pupils a breadth of study suited to their interests. Language provision is a particular strength throughout the school and separate sciences are taught to all ages. The IGCSE has been introduced in many subjects to promote more rigorous learning in preparation for the newly introduced Pre-University qualification in the sixth form, which is taking over from the AS and A level examinations. The more able pupils often enter public examinations early, and many begin to study sixth-form courses in Years 10 and 11 to provide them with more challenge. The programmes for personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship and careers are thorough and extremely well integrated into the curriculum, with coherent and extensive, personalized guidance offered.
- 3.7 Pupils benefit from the opportunities provided outside the classroom. Sporting opportunities from polo to pilates are enthusiastically enjoyed. Teams allow for all levels of ability to participate successfully in the main sports. The creative subjects are diverse, including dance, from ballet to hip-hop and Scottish reels, and a wide range of practical activities is enjoyed, such as home economics, arts and crafts, and DT. Workshops and societies of all types flourish, as in the Phoenix Society organised by the pupils themselves with other schools to encourage debate and research. There are stimulating lectures, seminars, educational visits of all kinds, study days, and dramatic performances which go out into the community, including performances at international festivals.
- 3.8 Links with the local community and further afield abound. The pupils help children with special needs at local schools, visit the elderly in the local village home, help at charity shops, and work in various community based projects. The boarding houses also have links with schools overseas including in Malawi, Malaysia, and Botswana, raising money for resources and making visits. An outstanding opportunity, of exceptional value, is the term that the Year 8 pupils spend in France, taught in French, learning amongst other things, the mysteries of truffle hunting.

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

- 3.9 Throughout the school the overall quality of teaching is excellent and is a major contribution to the high level of achievement and progress made by the pupils. The school is successful in fulfilling its aim to promote teaching that is stimulating and secures positive relationships with pupils through the use of praise and encouragement. Lessons fully meet the needs of all pupils. Planning is thoughtful and careful to nurture intellectual curiosity and develop initiative. Lessons are delivered at a brisk pace, encompassing a variety of methods, and require the pupils to complete challenging tasks which extend their thinking and practical skills. As a result of dynamic and inspiring teaching a sixth-form politics lesson, on the differences between traditional and new right conservatism, extended the pupils' listening skills and gave them opportunities to express their own ideas and opinions. Imaginative teaching is used to draw out higher levels of creativity and practical skills. In GCSE art the clever use of mixed media helped to develop a wide variety of techniques and an aesthetic appreciation of colour and texture. In the very few less successful lessons teaching underestimates the high ability of the pupils, and lesson plans are not well structured and lack sufficient challenge to engage their interest. This is more evident in lessons for the younger age groups.
- 3.10 Teaching shows excellent subject knowledge and staff enjoy good relationships with their pupils. In most lessons teaching promotes good behaviour but when lessons fail to interest the pupils, behaviour becomes unsettled and concentration levels fall. Most teaching promotes co-operative learning and pupils are encouraged to share their knowledge and work together on research topics in pairs and groups. The opportunity to work independently is common especially when using ICT to prepare presentations and to complete projects. Younger pupils enjoyed researching a topic on substance abuse and GCSE geographers researched a variety of techniques to make interesting presentations on coastal erosion on the coast of Yorkshire. Departments are well resourced. In the best lessons resources such as interactive whiteboards are used effectively, as seen in an animation of the Large Hadron Collider which was used to consolidate understanding during a complex A-level lesson on particle physics. Teaching makes excellent use of the school site as a learning environment for example in the completion of A-level biology field work projects.
- 3.11 The quality of marking and assessment is good. In the best marking, teachers give pupils explicit and subject-specific advice on ways to improve their work to make progress. These include references to assessment objectives and the use of feedback forms. Oral feedback is always thorough. Detailed data collection of academic information is used well to increase awareness of pupils' ability and progress. It is allowing teachers to set more challenging targets for the pupils' achievement and to give appropriate support to those with LDD and EAL to maintain progress.

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

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

- 4.1 The personal development of the pupils is excellent. The school is extremely successful in meeting its aim of enabling pupils to learn to respect individuality, value cultural diversity, and grow in an understanding and acceptance of themselves and society.
- 4.2 The spiritual development of the pupils is good and is evident in how they conduct their daily lives. The Christian values promoted by the school enable all pupils to develop their own spirituality underpinned by sound moral standards. A purposeful, but calm, atmosphere pervades the school, allowing pupils time to grow in confidence, develop their own personality, and understand their place in the community. Some pupils develop their own spiritual awareness by preparing for confirmation and they enjoy the service and commemorative meal. Others appreciate the beauty in what they see and hear in the school environment, and this is especially apparent in their response to creative subjects. Ballet is enjoyed by many and contemporary dance initiates thoughtful comments. Appreciation of good music is evident, especially the inspiring singing in chapel. They take the many opportunities in the curriculum to articulate their beliefs and they show an informed understanding of other faiths in their discussions of their traditions.
- 4.3 The pupils' moral development is outstanding. Pupils have a strong moral sense, appreciating the difference between right and wrong and recognising the importance of rules. Pupils recognise the importance of good relationships between adults and other pupils. Although in response to questionnaires some pupils of all ages felt that staff were not fair in either the application of sanctions or their dealing with pupils, inspection evidence does not support these concerns. Pupils recognise the importance of standards and respect the roles of those responsible for them. They have developed responsible and mature attitudes as a result of the harmonious atmosphere that prevails. School assemblies are spiritual and moral in content and the pupils relish the opportunity to lead and share the responsibility for the development of moral integrity.
- 4.4 Throughout the school pupils show an excellent level of social maturity; they are polite and friendly to the adults they meet and are supportive of each other. They confidently take on the many opportunities available for responsibility, especially in the running of the houses. They develop genuine friendship groups, are happy around school, have a strong sense of competitive spirit and enjoy the opportunities afforded to work together in teams and across year groups. Pupils make informed judgements about their community and are not afraid to voice their thoughts, raise issues through the school council and to effect change. Through their work in PSHE and the study of politics pupils develop knowledge of political institutions and services in Britain.
- 4.5 The strong cultural development of the pupils is evident in their knowledge of other cultures through their experiences abroad and their charity work. The experience for pupils in providing both financial and practical support to others ranges across many different cultures and is a real strength of their education. They come to understand western European culture through visits to concerts and theatres, in their study of literature and art and during the term they spend in France. National day lunches are enjoyed by pupils and overseas pupils value these links with their own cultural

identities. Pupils are exposed to cultural differences through all aspects of the curriculum and through their boarding experience.

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

- 4.6 By its careful and comprehensive arrangements for welfare, health and safety the school provides excellent support and guidance for all its pupils. Pastoral care in the school is outstanding and is a major factor of the pupils' excellent personal development. House staff are at the heart of this excellent care, providing a homely base where they can be contacted throughout the day if needed. This gives pupils a sense of security and confidence. The house system is backed up by an excellent tutor system and further support is available from very approachable middle and senior management. The sixth form take their role in supporting Year 7 pupils very seriously and the allocation of a Year 8 pupil as a Year 7 mentor is very much appreciated by the younger pupils.
- 4.7 In responses to the questionnaire the majority of pupils commented on how much they love their school, enjoy boarding, feel safe and happy and develop firm friendship groups whilst at school. An issue raised by a small number is a lack of monitoring of their workloads by staff. The inspection found no evidence to support this, although some house staff acknowledged that younger pupils found it difficult to develop skills to manage their time and work. Standards of behaviour are generally high and this is supported by the record of sanctions applied. The school management system ensures excellent levels of communication exist between all members of the pastoral team so that matters of concern regarding pupils are tracked and accurate records maintained.
- 4.8 There are good policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the pupils, including a detailed anti-bullying policy and procedures for promoting good behaviour and guarding against harassment. Pupils say that bullying is rare and any that occurs is dealt with quickly and effectively. All staff have had child protection training. The safeguarding policy meets requirements and is implemented successfully. Arrangements to ensure health and safety are effective. Detailed risk assessments are adhered to and these are regularly reviewed. All necessary measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken and the required fire prevention procedures are in place. Pupils benefit from an exceptionally good medical centre with fully qualified medical staff. Thorough health records are maintained and medicines are stored and distributed safely. The school has a three-year disability plan in operation and access for the disabled to all facilities is good. Good policies and practices are in place for pupils with LDD and EAL.
- 4.9 There is a sound healthy living programme promoted through the house staff, tutors and the PSHE programme. Pupils are encouraged to be healthy through the development of good eating habits and excellent facilities for exercise and sporting activities promote healthy lifestyles. The admission and attendance records are properly maintained and correctly stored.

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

- 4.10 Boarding makes an excellent contribution to the broader education of pupils and their personal development and fulfils the school's aim to provide a caring and nurturing environment where happy and secure relationships can thrive. The recommendation of the most recent boarding report has been met.
- 4.11 The accommodation is comfortable, cosy and personalised to create a homely atmosphere. Rooms allow for single or double accommodation in the sixth form to provide privacy and for small numbers in younger years to help in the creation of strong friendship groups. The common rooms are spacious and kitchens and laundry facilities allow for a measure of independence to be developed. Good study and technology facilities allow for the successful completion of prep. Excellent sixth-form facilities include their own kitchens to prepare food, laundry, and common rooms which provide a good balance of independence and community living in preparation for university. The separate sixth-form dining room allows them to meet socially in a relaxed atmosphere. The food throughout the school is of excellent quality, ensuring that pupils have a good choice to meet all dietary needs.
- 4.12 Dedicated house staff provide excellent individual care and support. All house staff are suitably trained and they are approachable, warm and friendly. Relationships between boarding staff and pupils are excellent. All policies and procedures are in place to ensure that the welfare of pupils is a priority and that the pupils feel safe in their houses and around the site. The views of boarders are listened to and any concerns are handled with care. Regular communication with parents is maintained through email and telephone. The medical centre and its staff provide excellent support and they are another source of comfort when required.
- 4.13 There is a wide variety of extra-curricular activities on offer throughout the week and at weekends. Sports facilities are good and well used and music, art and drama provide other popular activities allowing further development of pupils' creative talent. Older pupils are allowed out in groups and the younger boarders have the opportunity to visit nearby towns for shopping and cultural visits.

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

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

- 5.1 The governance of the school is excellent. A cohesive and hard-working board of governors is fully committed to maintaining the high standards of the school in both academic achievement and personal development of the pupils. Since the last inspection they have made considerable investment in accommodation and resources and in improving the efficiency of the school's administration. Governors have a clear vision for the future, recognising the importance of strong financial oversight and estate management but always giving priority to decisions that are educationally sound. They offer an excellent breadth of experience and knowledge in education and in financial management, which contributes significantly to the strategic planning for the future development of the school.
- 5.2 The governors are mindful of their responsibilities for child protection and health and safety. Close attention is given to safeguarding and appointment procedures. Governors have formal meetings four times a year, with detailed minutes and an agenda that includes child protection matters and the review of policies. A number of committees, such as the finance, education and estates committees, the latter of which is responsible for matters of health and safety, meet frequently throughout the year and their thinking provides the detail for strategic planning. Every new governor has an induction on good governance and training is plentiful, including that for child protection. The chair of governors appraises the head every year in accordance with the school's appraisal policy.
- 5.3 Although the governing body delegates responsibility to the head and leadership team they have a questioning approach to decision-making. Members of the leadership team attend governors' meetings and governors spend a day in school each year attending classes. Governors have a high profile in school events and give excellent support to the head and leadership team. The chair of governors meets with the head on a monthly basis to discuss issues and progress. They have ensured that the recommendation of the last report to improve departmental planning has been fully met.

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

- 5.4 In all sectors of the school the leadership and management are outstanding. All are united in furthering the school's vision to provide an educational environment where pupils will develop a love of learning, achieve their academic potential and flourish in their personal development. The exceptional leadership provided by the head is particularly successful in creating a community where the staff work as a united team and all feel truly valued.
- 5.5 All sectors of the school are represented on the leadership team, and roles are clear with effective distribution of responsibilities. Senior leaders continually strive to move the school forward through the promotion of good practice in teaching and learning and in standards of pastoral care. Academic monitoring and the effective use of educational data are displaying positive results in academic standards; however, monitoring of the less effective teaching to improve learning for pupils in all subjects is insufficiently close. Strategic development planning is thorough, collaborative and focused to promote excellence. A thorough review is conducted twice a year to assess the level of success and progress. Excellent communication

is maintained with the middle leadership team and meetings are frequent, clearly focused and carefully minuted. As recommended in the last report, detailed departmental development plans are now produced by all academic departments and boarding houses, and priorities are carefully established and set against time scales. A self-reflective approach is encouraged when reviewing and assessing performance each year and is measured against whole school objectives.

- 5.6 Performance management is thorough and is used effectively with individual targets linked to the school's development priorities. Professional development is carefully considered and a staff development officer ensures training is linked to whole school targets. The safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of the pupils are given high priority, with all staff trained in these areas. The school has rigorous appointment procedures, all necessary checks are carried out to ensure the suitability of staff, and the central register is complete. The school has recruited and retained highly qualified teaching and non-teaching staff. The administration and support staff are outstanding, with excellent organisation and efficiency. The buildings and grounds are maintained in excellent order and contribute significantly to the learning environment provided for the pupils. The lighting and quality of pathways have been improved as recommended by the last inspection report. This is a school where all staff, teaching and non-teaching, work closely together to provide a community where all can thrive.

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

- 5.7 Links between the school and the parents are excellent. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire show that parents are strongly satisfied with all aspects of the education provided for their children. Almost all parents agree that the school provides a good quality of education and care, promotes worthwhile attitudes and achieves high standards of behaviour. They agree that concerns are handled well and that they can communicate easily with the school. The inspection team found the few concerns raised by the parents in the questionnaire have been handled effectively by the school.
- 5.8 The school encourages regular feedback from parents and conducts a parental survey every five years. They respond to suggestions for improvement and many suggestions have been implemented. The school has a good complaints policy available to parents with clear procedures. In the last academic year no complaint has gone beyond the initial stage. General email contact with the senior leadership team and house staff ensures that parental concerns are handled quickly. All correspondence with parents is carefully logged to ensure continuity of care.
- 5.9 Due to the nature of the full boarding environment many parents live at a distance from the school, and because of this communication with parents is given a high priority. All parents and prospective parents are issued with the required information about the school including the contact details of the chair of governors as recommended in the last inspection report. The school website is particularly effective and plays a valuable part in day to day contact. A dedicated parent site keeps parents informed of important dates and events and is thorough in its detail of school policies and procedures including the safeguarding policy. Parents can access personalised information about their children including academic progress and examination information. The school does not have a parents association, but it is gradually increasing the programme of social events throughout the year to give parents the opportunity to be more involved in school life. There is at least one

parents' evening a year for each year group and parents receive ample opportunities to visit the boarding houses to discuss their children with the boarding staff.

- 5.10 The school produces high quality and informative publications, such as the general information booklets which offer information and guidance for all pupils and parents of current or prospective pupils. An annual magazine acknowledges the many and varied activities of the school year, and extra-curricular information such as 'Ledger Lines' from the music department allows them to feel part of the cultural and creative development of their daughters.

**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 chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mrs Maureen Bradley	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Julie Roseblade	Headmistress, GSA school
Mr Robert Carlisle	Headmaster, GSA school
Mrs Sandra Clements	Deputy Head, GSA school
Mr Ian Mitchell	College Proctor, HMC school
Miss Jean Walker	Senior Teacher, GSA school