

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

North Cestrian Grammar School

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| Full Name of the School | North Cestrian Grammar School |
| DCSF Number | 358/6003 |
| Registered Charity Number | 525925 |
| Address | Dunham Road, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4AJ. |
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| Email Address | office@ncgs.co.uk |
| Headmaster | Mr David Vanstone |
| Chairman of Governors | Mr Ian Parrott |
| Age Range | 11 to 18 |
| Gender | Boys (11 to 16) Mixed (16 to 18) |
| Inspection Dates | 5th to 8th November 2007 |

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005 and May 2007.

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. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 North Cestrian Grammar School was founded in 1951 to provide an education for boys with grammar school aspirations who might otherwise be denied such provision. Over the years its intake of pupils has broadened and the school also seeks to provide for those who may not achieve their potential in other independent or maintained schools in the area. The school's mission is to provide high standards and broad academic and extra-curricular opportunities in a relatively small community, where each pupil can be recognised as an individual. The school aims to prove that everyone can excel in some area, given opportunity and encouragement, and to develop responsibility, initiative, self-confidence, self-respect, leadership and concern for others so that the pupils grow into young adults who are happy in daily life, confident in relationships with others and self-motivated in their work.
- 1.2 The school caters for boys aged from 11 to 18 with a small number of girls in the sixth form. It has a suburban location close to the centre of Altrincham, with extensive playing fields a short distance away. Many pupils live locally but some come from a much wider geographical area.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection there were 291 pupils on roll, including 55 boys and 4 girls in Years 12 and 13. Entry to the school is by examination and the school's standardised tests show that pupils' abilities on entry vary very widely, from well below to above the national average. Overall, the ability profile of the school is in line with the national average and, if pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results in GCSE and A level will be comparable to the average for all maintained secondary schools. Some pupils leave and others are admitted to the school after GCSEs. The majority of Year 13 pupils proceed to higher education.
- 1.4 Since the last inspection girls have been admitted to the sixth form. Plans are in place for the gradual introduction of full co-education, beginning with the admission of girls into Years 7 and 9 from September 2008. The school is also developing plans to add an international dimension to its pupil intake. A number of new facilities have been developed since the last inspection, including a school hall, library and information and communication technology (ICT) suite.
- 1.5 The school has identified eighty-two pupils as having learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD), of whom five have a statement of special educational needs (SEN). All are funded by their local authority. Six pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), one of whom receives support for English.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The school's clear awareness of its specific ability profile ensures that the educational experience provided meets its aim to provide high standards and broad academic and extra-curricular opportunities for all pupils. A warm and caring learning environment, in which they thrive without fear of failure, ensures that pupils develop well both academically and socially and maximize their potential.
- 2.2 A further aim, for every pupil to improve in both self-esteem and confidence in all aspects of his or her educational experience, is met very successfully through the establishment of a family environment where every pupil is seen as an individual, is known personally by name and feels valued. This was not only evident in the approach shown by the teachers, but also in the care and dedication demonstrated by the administrative and ancillary staff. In discussion, a pupil commented on the school's caring family ethos.
- 2.3 The education provided successfully contributes to all areas of pupils' development. Their linguistic and mathematical skills are well developed across the curriculum, the breadth and balance of which enable a broad range of scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative skills to be strongly promoted. Pupils are actively encouraged to contribute orally, to listen carefully and to enhance their literacy and numeracy skills.
- 2.4 Since the last inspection, the building of a new school hall has enabled the former hall to be redeveloped as a new, attractive and well-used library. Together with investment in an ICT suite, these improvements to the school's facilities have significantly enhanced the pupils' educational experience. They are able to read, investigate and do homework during the lunch break in quiet, supervised surroundings. The librarian, appointed following a recommendation in the last inspection report, works closely with the pupils and encourages them to make suggestions about the purchase of stock, ensuring that a wide range of books is available.
- 2.5 The extensive breadth of extra-curricular activities enhances effectively the educational experience of all the pupils. Emphasis is placed on participation alongside achievement and staff ensure that there is no elitism. Sporting activities are popular and very well organised and these are supplemented by many other enriching activities including drama, Eco Club, ICT and art clubs. The outdoor pursuits programme for Years 7 to 9 and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DoE) scheme are major contributors towards the pupils' broader educational experience with a very large number of pupils participating in the DoE up to gold award level. Such activities further develop the pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Regular assemblies and house meetings are well-received occasions when all achievements are recognised and praised. Work experience in Year 10 is well organised and effective. The extensive displays of art work and photographs throughout the school contribute towards the feeling of achievement and self-worth. The teachers give generously of their time and are fully aware of the intrinsic value and importance of such activities. A wide range of trips is available to pupils, promoting educational, sporting and cultural experiences, including a ski trip and a visit to the trenches and war graves in the Somme.
- 2.6 The pupils are well prepared for the next stage of education. They are given tailored advice about their choice of GCSEs by individual staff, by tutors and by the local careers advisory service. The school accepts small teaching groups at A level, ensuring a good range of subjects and enabling pupils to study their first choice subjects. For those considering university, considerable attention is given to the selection of courses and destinations to suit

- their particular needs and abilities. The careers library is well resourced, well used and provides an attractive environment in which to investigate careers opportunities.
- 2.7 The curriculum is well planned and provides equality of access and opportunity for the extensive ability range, promoting participation in a wide range of subject related activities. Carefully considered provision has also been made for pupils with physical disabilities. At GCSE, AS and A level, the school is active in offering pupils option choices which reflect their aspirations, demonstrating the breadth of the educational opportunities provided. The provision of a well-tailored, reduced range of GCSE subjects for the less academically able contributes positively to their overall success, by allowing them more time to study their chosen subjects.
- 2.8 Pupils requiring learning support are well catered for within the curriculum. Teachers are provided with detailed and regularly updated information on classroom strategies to support pupils with particular needs. In many areas the teaching takes good account of the advice provided but this is not universal and systems of monitoring do not fully ensure that all teachers employ such strategies and that every individual need is catered for. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are well provided for within the classroom, pastorally and within the extra-curricular activities.
- 2.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.10 Pupils' learning and achievements are good and show that they are well educated. The school is successful in meeting its aim to encourage each pupil to achieve his or her potential in academic and extra-curricular areas.
- 2.11 Throughout the school, pupils are well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding. In all subjects across the curriculum and in the best lessons, pupils applied essential skills productively to enhance their learning. In several classes, notably A-level English and sports science, pupils were observed thinking critically and acting creatively. Pupils of average and below average ability achieve well and the learning and achievement of those of above average ability is satisfactory. There is no significant difference in relative attainment between different curricular areas.
- 2.12 Since the last inspection, achievement in public examinations has improved. Pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations is good in relation to their abilities. GCSE results over the last three years have been above the national average for all maintained schools. The school makes good use of standardised attainment tests to predict grades which, when compared with the actual results, give a clear indication that levels of progress are good. Pupils' attainment at A level is satisfactory in relation to their abilities and their performance in A-level examinations over the past three years has been broadly in line with national averages.
- 2.13 The DoE Award scheme is a significant area of achievement in the school. Although it is voluntary, every member of Year 9 signed up for the programme and the vast majority will be going for the bronze award in 2007/8. Additionally, the school strongly supports individual and group participation in sports, both within the school and in national and regional competitions outside school. This enables a number of pupils to continue to participate in sport at a very high level.
- 2.14 The development of the skills for learning and the attitudes of pupils of all ages towards work and study across the curriculum are strong. Pupils are articulate and frequently

contribute enthusiastically in class. They listen intently in both lessons and assemblies. Most pupils read intelligently and their writing is often fluent.

- 2.15 Pupils apply mathematics and mathematical concepts effectively under the direct guidance of the teacher. Mathematical skills are confidently applied outside mathematics lessons in music technology and business studies, and numeracy skills were observed being well used in physics.
- 2.16 Pupils make effective use of ICT. It is exploited across the whole of the music curriculum through good use of keyboards by the younger pupils and skilful use of composing, editing and sequencing software in the GCSE and A-level classes. Slideshow presentations are effectively employed by pupils in science and ICT is used extensively for research, particularly by A-level students. The creative use of ICT is also a strong feature of various clubs. In some subjects, however, the use of ICT is undeveloped.
- 2.17 In many lessons, when given the opportunity, pupils think effectively for themselves. Reasoning skills and cogent argument were demonstrated in several Year 12 and 13 lessons. Sometimes reliance on the textbook restricts the development and extension of the skills of the more able pupils. Note-taking is not a fully developed skill throughout Years 7 to 9, where pupils often copy notes from the board. Good note-taking skills were observed in science in Years 10 and 11, in Year 12 sports science and Year 13 English lessons. Many pupils study and work effectively on their own, and their use of the internet is developing to support their work. Good examples of co-operative learning were observed in paired and group work across several subject areas.
- 2.18 Most pupils settle themselves well in lessons, apply themselves diligently to the task in hand and persevere where they encounter difficulties. In nearly all lessons pupils' enthusiasm and eagerness to please were evident. It is clear that pupils enjoy their schoolwork and are keen to give of their best.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.19 All aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. The pupils' spiritual development reflects the core aims of the school's mission statement well.
- 2.20 Pupils display a high degree of self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. Although some pupils join the school with low self-esteem, they almost always leave as confident young citizens. In discussion, a number of them emphasised strongly that they felt valued as individuals and totally secure within the school's environment. The continual encouragement by staff and peers to 'have a go without fearing failure' is understood and appreciated by the pupils to be an important motivational factor in their spiritual development, creating a climate in which they work to their full potential in lessons and take a full and active part in all other aspects of school life.
- 2.21 Through art, drama, music, literature and crafts, pupils express their innermost thoughts and feelings and are able to reflect on their experience. They value personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons very highly. Pupils' questions and opinions are encouraged, giving them freedom to ponder and express their own thoughts, ideas and concerns. A strong mutual respect is evident between staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves. The pupils look forward to receiving praise and rewards, specifically in assemblies and house meetings, since it raises their awareness of the esteem in which the school community holds them. In accordance with the mission statement, such praise is often as much for participation as for actually achieving.

- 2.22 There is a clear moral code as a basis for behaviour, which is very well understood and promoted consistently throughout the school, and is evident in the pupils' conduct. Pupils readily accept the fairness of sanctions imposed for inappropriate actions. They take responsibility for their actions and behave at a very high standard throughout the school campus as well as during lessons. The younger pupils consider that the older pupils set a good example of correct and acceptable behaviour. Pupils display a high degree of respect for everyone irrespective of race, religion, culture or gender and are extremely tolerant. Posters, photographs and classroom displays reinforce the school's core values of respect and tolerance. PSHE and citizenship lessons promote respect for the law.
- 2.23 As they progress through the school pupils develop well socially. They willingly accept increased responsibilities and play a full and active part in the community either on the sports field, in drama or participating in the lunchtime activities on offer. Pupils understand that behaviour, both good and bad, has consequences and fully support the discipline system within the school, both for its effectiveness and its fairness. The prefects lead by example and are at ease in the performance of their duties. Their example is a factor in pupils of all ages relating with each other extremely well, resulting in mutual respect and tolerance across the whole age range. Pupils like to help each other as they recognise that support and co-operation are the accepted norms of the school. PSHE lessons enable the pupils to gain a very good knowledge of public institutions. A drama lesson included an excellent "improvisation of loneliness" activity. Pupils were divided into small groups where they had to think for themselves about loneliness and then devise a role play situation. The empathy displayed by the pupils was palpable as they thought sensitively about the affected person in this situation.
- 2.24 PSHE classes encourage and educate pupils very effectively about different cultures. The use of satellite broadcasts from France in French lessons enables pupils to gain further insights into neighbouring cultures. A strong sense of individual tolerance and respect for other cultures is reflected in assemblies, where visiting speakers from a variety of faiths, for example Jewish, Muslim and Christian, are welcomed. They thereby develop a good understanding of the different cultural values within the school community, whilst their knowledge and experience of cultures further afield are developed through overseas trips such as a visit to China and a canoeing trip down the Zambesi. All pupils, irrespective of cultural background, are fully integrated into the life of the school.
- 2.25 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.26 The quality of teaching is good. The overall quality of the teaching has been maintained since the last inspection. Provision for those pupils who require learning support in lessons represents an improvement since the last inspection, although it is not yet universal.
- 2.27 The teaching observed in all classes was never less than satisfactory and in most cases was good with a little that was better. Teaching enables pupils of all abilities, including those with statements of SEN and with LDD and those for whom English is an additional language, to acquire new knowledge. The recent employment of a teaching assistant provides good support to the pupils with statements of special educational needs. Empathetic and sympathetic teaching encourages pupils of average ability or below to work hard and these pupils benefit more from the teacher-led activities than the more able. In many lessons the teaching took good account of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and the teachers offered individual support as necessary. In a Year 10 biology lesson, for example, the teacher had identified a pupil with reading and writing difficulties and provided one to

- one help accordingly. In the most effective lessons, pupils with particular needs are highlighted in the lesson planning and their needs identified, enabling them to make good progress in the lessons. Equivalent support for the most able pupils is more patchy and means that, in some cases, their needs are not always met. In some lessons the focus on independent work is insufficient and not enough attention is paid to the planning of a range of activities to meet pupils' different needs. This results in fewer opportunities for the more able pupils to be suitably challenged.
- 2.28 Teaching strongly encourages pupils in the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort. In the best lessons, pupils' endeavours are stimulated by a range of teaching methods and a variety of activities which help to sustain their efforts. Pupils are interested in their work, they are motivated and they strive to succeed. This was particularly evident in art, music technology, English and design and technology (DT), and in a sports science lesson, where the teaching enabled pupils to think and learn for themselves through the investigation of different aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in sport.
- 2.29 The teaching is well planned in almost all of the lessons. Planning reflects the schemes of work well and enables the pupils to remain on task. In a Year 10 French lesson, for example, pupils were prepared well for a listening exercise by studying the necessary vocabulary. This ensured a high degree of pupil participation and good levels of success. In the best lessons careful planning ensures that the pace is good throughout. A small number of lessons observed lacked pace at times.
- 2.30 Teachers have a good understanding of the aptitudes and prior attainment of the pupils. The school's family atmosphere and focus on the needs of the individual ensure that the teachers know the pupils well and can adapt their approach accordingly. Teachers are furnished with useful information and effective strategies for teaching pupils with LDD and for promoting good behaviour. In the best lessons these are well used, although some staff are less familiar with the advice provided. In a mathematics lesson, the teacher skilfully engaged pupil interest by linking the concept of algebraic substitution with that of a football substitute in a team and the pupils were able to relate the concept of substitution to well-known footballers.
- 2.31 In a Year 9 music lesson, the teacher supported the less able pupils well so that they could cope with playing a basic repeated phrase on the keyboards. However the project did not present sufficient challenge for the more able students. The teaching demonstrates that the teachers have good subject knowledge and in almost all classes the pupils were well taught by subject specialists. Security of subject knowledge enables the subject matter to be delivered well and results in the teachers directing the pupils well in applying their learning skills effectively. In a Year 7 French lesson, French was used almost exclusively at a level which engaged the pupils for the whole lesson and included the use of a live satellite French television weather broadcast.
- 2.32 Teaching makes good use of the extensive range of resources across the curriculum, most notably in music and sport. Recent investment means that the school now has very good ICT facilities and their use across the curriculum is still being developed. The sharing of resources in the English department is excellent.
- 2.33 Excellent teacher-pupil relationships were observed in almost all of the classes. There is a genuine, understated and mutual respect between the teacher and pupil in the school which ensures responsible behaviour from pupils in the classroom. The ethos of the school means that pupils are well motivated to behave responsibly and recognise that disciplinary measures are fair.

- 2.34 Regular and effective assessment takes place in all year groups. The assessment system informs planning of the teaching, and is understood by the pupils. This results in the pupils achieving grades for which they feel truly proud and this in turn reflects the school's aims. These grades are referenced to national norms and are communicated regularly to parents.
- 2.35 The marking of pupils' work is regular. The quality of marking is variable; the best examples include constructive, positive commentary, with clear pointers for improvement, while other work is marked in a sparse manner, sometimes amounting to little more than a numerical figure with no explanatory comment. The good practice of having a common marking scheme stuck in pupils' exercise books is fully understood and valued by the pupils and is effective in informing them about the quality of their work. It also promotes a common approach across different subjects.
- 2.36 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils

- 3.1 Pastoral care and the provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils are significant strengths of the school and are of very high quality. The school is successful in achieving its aims of enabling pupils to develop in confidence, to respect others, to accept responsibility and to feel safe and valued.
- 3.2 The management arrangements for pastoral care, based on form teachers, year heads and heads of sixth form enable staff to provide effective support to all pupils. The correct procedures for registration of pupils are followed.
- 3.3 Pastoral arrangements enable teachers to provide high quality care for the pupils. Teachers know the pupils, their characters and their strengths and weaknesses very well and monitor their progress closely. The pastoral teams keep a careful and effective check on pupils' pastoral needs and keep the headmaster very well informed of all issues regarding pastoral care. Information pertaining to individual pupils is shared by the headmaster and between teachers at weekly staff briefings. Overall the provision works very well. Pupils consider that teachers are approachable and note that they can discuss pastoral concerns with them easily. Pupils report that issues are rapidly and effectively dealt with.
- 3.4 The quality of relationships is very positive throughout the school community, and mutual respect is widely evident among pupils, within and across year groups, and between pupils and staff, whether teaching, administrative or ancillary.
- 3.5 Policies to promote good discipline and behaviour are very effective and the approach towards discipline, focussing on praise, rewards and sanctions, is clear to pupils, who generally respect the school rules. Each teacher is encouraged to develop his or her own reward systems within the classroom. The school's system of merit marks, leading to merit certificates works well and is understood, respected and valued by the pupils. Sanctions similarly follow a graduated approach, involving parents at an appropriate stage. Suitable anti-bullying policies and procedures are in place. These are effective and no evidence of bullying was found during the inspection.
- 3.6 The school has thorough and effective child protection policies and procedures. Staff have received suitable child protection awareness training and a governor maintains a responsibility for overseeing that staff with responsibility for child protection receive appropriate training.
- 3.7 The school has due regard for health and safety obligations and has in place effective documentation and procedures. Health and safety have a high profile throughout the school, especially in science and DT. Measures to safeguard and promote pupils' health and welfare are very effective. The health and safety committee meets regularly and ensures potential issues and concerns are thoroughly discussed and suitable action is taken. Risk assessments for visits are thorough and those for potentially hazardous activities in departments have been undertaken. The first aid policy and procedures are concise. Many of the staff have first aid qualifications, some to the higher level. Names of these staff appear on electronic boards around the school with information for pupils as to the course of action to take if they should have an accident or feel ill. The school has received a report from the fire authority and an effective fire risk policy is in place.

- 3.8 The school fulfils the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act and its duties under race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- 3.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.10 The school has good links with parents and strong links with the community. Parents who responded to the parental pre-inspection questionnaire are particularly pleased with the teaching, the standards of behaviour and the support and guidance provided by the school.
- 3.11 Parents have good opportunities to be involved in the life of the school. They support school teams in sports fixtures and attend music and drama presentations and events such as the annual carol concert. The opinions of parents are sought through questionnaires and, where possible, the school takes these into account in its planning, for example in the move to co-education. Each year group has a very valuable parents' advisory evening, which covers topics such as GCSE options and enables parents to be involved in the work and progress of the children. The Parents' Association has a small dedicated committee on which the headmaster and a staff representative also sit. The association runs a variety of events throughout the school year that enhance the social life of the school and raise funds that benefit pupils, such as the purchase of a minibus and the presentation to each pupil leaving Year 13 with a farewell present, last year an engraved glass, as a memento of their time at the school. This gesture reinforces the family atmosphere of the school community.
- 3.12 Parents are regularly provided with very good, up-to-date information about the school. They receive a comprehensive booklet of information for parents and new starters that contains the school rules and discipline policy. The weekly newsletters are a very effective means of conveying information to parents and these also are available on the website. An admissions booklet, available for parents, contains names and qualifications of staff and results of the previous year's GCSE and A-level examinations. Reports provide parents with useful information about pupils' progress. An appropriate number of consultation evenings enable parents to discuss children's progress with the relevant teachers.
- 3.13 The school deals properly with parents' concerns. It welcomes parental contact and meets its aims of maintaining good communication. Parents are encouraged to make an appointment to see relevant staff if they have a particular concern and they may email staff directly at school. Parents may contact the headmaster directly and he is justly proud of management arrangements which ensure that parents are easily able to meet with him. The school's complaints procedure is available on request.
- 3.14 The school makes worthwhile links with the community. Visitors from the local community, including religious leaders and representatives of local and national charities are a feature of school assemblies. This is often linked to charitable giving, which is actively encouraged. Both local and national charities are generously supported by pupils and staff, collectively and individually. The school has formed links with a local hospice following an assembly in which a donation was made and an "own clothes" day raised significant funds for a local epilepsy centre. Work experience links have developed with a local special school and the Eco Club has gained the silver award in the "Eco Schools Sustainable Lifestyle" campaign as a result of its work on recycling and promoting sustainable development.
- 3.15 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The quality of governance is good. Members of the governing body have a good range of skills and experience appropriate for supporting the work of the school. Its effective structure, together with well-organised management arrangements, ensures that governors gain a good overview of the school. The governing body meets regularly and agendas are comprehensive. Individual governors, who take on responsibility for particular areas of school life, are able to report back to the full meeting and provide a good oversight of the areas for which they have responsibility. Sub-committees are created as necessary to oversee particular ventures, such as building projects.
- 4.2 Governors are well briefed on their responsibilities by the headmaster and as a consequence have clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They undertake annual child protection training and involve themselves appropriately in the educational development of the school, an example being a meeting for parents, chaired by the chairman, to discuss the proposal to introduce co-education. A governor is responsible for overseeing the school's finances and reporting to the full board, enabling it to participate well in financial planning and ensure good educational provision and investment in resources. The major annual projects are proposed well in advance and progress is reported to governors, who ensure that appropriate checks and controls are in place.
- 4.3 The headmaster and deputy head attend governors' meetings and are the main conduit for liaison between staff and governors. This link, together with occasional informal meetings between staff and governors, enables governors to have a good insight into the working of the school. Heads of department present short reports to governors on their departments and both staff and governors find this useful, although such links are modest and not sufficient for governors to provide staff with a significant degree of support or an appropriate level of challenge. Governors' links with parents are not strong.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.4 The school benefits from strong leadership and management. The headmaster is in close day to day touch with the running of the school and knows every pupil well. He provides excellent leadership and clear educational direction for the school. The school's aims and the particular role the school plays in the local area are well understood by those with management responsibilities. The clear vision for the school is well known and understood by the staff and reflected in the good quality of education and the high levels of pastoral care.
- 4.5 The senior management team and school management committee are effective in analysing the school's needs. Members of the school management committee are developing a good understanding of their roles and the committee works very effectively in discussing pupils' individual needs, evaluating the work of the school and setting priorities, planning to meet those priorities, advising the headmaster and putting decisions into practice. An effective programme of self-evaluation through workshops and plenary review involved all staff in identifying the school's strengths, areas for development and priorities.
- 4.6 Management at all levels is effective in drawing up and implementing appropriate procedures and policies. A programme of lesson observations involves all staff and the headmaster and deputy undertake monitoring exercises to review the effectiveness of policies and procedures. Further development is set to ensure, for example, that staff are fully aware of the detailed

information provided about pupils with LDD, so that it impacts fully on their teaching, that the marking policy is followed consistently and that approaches to supporting pupils of different abilities, noted in the schemes of work, follow through into planning and teaching.

- 4.7 The school's management is effective in securing, supporting, developing and motivating the staff. Since the last inspection there has been an increased focus on staff training and the recommendation to appoint a librarian and technician has been followed. Both pupils and staff benefit from the support they provide. The school's development of its less experienced staff is particularly good, some of whom have progressed sufficiently to assume management responsibilities. During the inspection the headmaster was very successful in ensuring the continued quality of teaching in music technology with the appointment of a temporary teacher to cover for staff illness. Procedures for checking the suitability of staff, supply staff and governors are effective and thorough. The school's arrangements for the induction of its newly qualified teacher are successful.
- 4.8 The recently introduced appraisal system is becoming embedded in school routines and working well. The headmaster's open door policy means that appraisal is not the only vehicle for requesting training and staff feel very comfortable making a direct approach to him. Weekly staff training sessions in ICT have resulted in the staff beginning to exploit the potential of recent investment in this area.
- 4.9 A thorough system of development planning, budgeting and monitoring ensures that financial resources are well managed to secure very good facilities and resources which support the school in fulfilling its educational aims and meeting the needs of its pupils. The education of the pupils benefits from the recent building of several new facilities since the last inspection.
- 4.10 The administration of the school is excellent. The school's administrative team is efficient and ensures effective communication within the school and with parents. The team also provides support to the school over and above normal administrative duties, including the production of a weekly newsletter and help for pupils completing university application forms.
- 4.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.12 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 This is a school which understands its niche in the market well, has set appropriate aims and aspirations and is very successful in meeting them, thus ensuring a rewarding and fulfilling educational experience for its pupils. Pastoral care is excellent and the school's close attention to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils results in outstanding achievement in these areas. Whilst some of the teaching demonstrates a range of approaches and provides independent learning opportunities, this is not widespread, which limits some provision for the more able pupils. The quality of marking is not consistently high and familiarity with the information provided to support the teaching of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is not universal. However, support for the less able pupils is good overall and the school is particularly successful in motivating pupils of all personalities and abilities and in developing high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. These strengths are all significant factors in the school which enable its pupils to fulfil their potential.
- 5.2 The school has taken very good note of recommendations made at the last inspection and taken appropriate and effective action to secure improvement. Additional staff, including a librarian and technician, have been appointed as recommended and the library stock has been developed well. The building of a new hall, enabling the old hall to be redeveloped as a new library and the development of new facilities for ICT are significant improvements, the latter enabling better use of ICT across the curriculum, though this is yet to be fully developed. A renewed focus on staff development and better monitoring of teaching has resulted in good provision for low attainers. Provision for high attainers has improved but not to the same extent.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 In order to continue to improve and to build on existing good practice, the school should take the following steps.
1. Ensure that practice in all areas matches that of the best by further developing the procedures for monitoring of:
 - support in the classroom for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities;
 - the quality of marking;
 - the provision and use of a range of activities to suit pupils' differing needs.
 2. Ensure that the more able pupils reach their full potential through the further development of independent learning opportunities and activities that extend and challenge them.
 3. Ensure that the potential of the recently improved ICT facilities is fully exploited across the curriculum through the further development of the ICT skills of teaching staff.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 5th to 8th November 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Mr Christopher Sanderson | Reporting Inspector |
| Mrs Susan Court | Senior Manager, SHMIS School |
| Mr Francie Healy | Deputy Head, SHMIS School |
| Mrs Susan Isaac | Headteacher, ISA School |
| Mrs Geraldine Poulet-Bowden | Head of Science, ISA School |