



**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION  
THE ABBEY SCHOOL READING**

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## The Abbey School Reading

Full Name of School	<b>The Abbey School Reading</b>
DfE Number	<b>870/6008</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>309115</b>
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Telephone Number	<b>0118 987 2256</b>
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Head	<b>Mrs Rachel Dent</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Dr Debby Reynolds</b>
Age Range	<b>3 to 18</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>1105</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Girls</b>
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS): <b>70</b> 5-11: <b>320</b> 11-18: <b>715</b>
Head of EYFS Setting	<b>Mrs Isabel Archer</b>
EYFS Gender	<b>Girls</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>30 Sep 2014 to 03 Oct 2014</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in November 2008.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State 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, as amended. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed on the website [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). Additionally, inspections will consider the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Education (DfE) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors 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.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where Achievement is 'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade.** Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. **For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.**

## 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 and other governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited 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
Mr Nicholas England	Assistant Reporting Inspector
Mr Mark Brain	Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr Thomas Brooksby	Team Inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mrs Kate Carey	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, GSA school)
Mr Michael Dodd	Team Inspector (Head of Department, HMC school)
Mrs Susan Goff	Team Inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mr Chris Hall	Team Inspector (Head of Department, HMC school)
Mrs Ann McDonnell	Team Inspector (Former Head of Department, IAPS school)
Mrs Fiona McEwan-Cox	Team Inspector (Senior Manager, ISA school)
Dr Andrew Storey	Team Inspector (Head of Department, HMC school)
Dr Jonathan Tribbick	Team Inspector (Former Head, HMC school)
Mr Kenneth Underhill	Team Inspector (Head, ISA school)
Mrs Lynn Weeks	Team Inspector (Head of Early Years, IAPS school)
Mr Guy Willatt	Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Ann Richards	Co-ordinating Inspector for Early Years

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

- 1.1 The Abbey School Reading is an academically selective day school for girls from the ages of 3 to 18. It was founded in 1887 and moved to its current site in 1905, with the junior school and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) later moving to their own buildings about a third of a mile from the senior school. As a Church of England foundation, the school today continues its Christian tradition whilst embracing the diversity of a multi-cultural community. The school is administered by a governing body, which has oversight of both the senior and junior sections.
- 1.2 The school aims to provide an education that will empower girls to become confident, successful students, who will develop Christian values, a strong sense of integrity and moral responsibility to their community and society. It sets out to know all girls as individuals, promote excellence in all they do, and equip girls to lead fulfilled and productive adult lives in a rapidly changing world, in accordance with the aim to enhance global understanding.
- 1.3 Pupils travel to the school from Reading and the surrounding area, and come from a broad range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. At the time of the inspection there were 1105 pupils in the school. In the junior school there were 390 pupils, including 70 in the EYFS aged between 3 and 5. There were 715 pupils in the senior school, including 172 in the sixth form. The school has identified 57 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 29 receive learning support. There are 36 pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) and a range of support is offered to them according to their needs. However, most needs are minimal as almost all of these girls are bilingual. The average ability of pupils at all stages in the school is above the national average. In the junior school most pupils have an ability that is at least above average, with some having well above average ability. Few pupils are of below average ability. In the senior school two-fifths of pupils have ability that is well above average, and the majority of pupils in the sixth form have ability that is at least above average, with some well above average and few of below average ability.
- 1.4 In September 2014 a new head was appointed for the whole school, and an acting head appointed for the junior school. Changes have been made to the structure of the senior leadership team (SLT) and there is now one deputy head for the whole school and three assistant heads. Since the previous inspection expansion of the junior school, the EYFS and the sixth form has taken place. An additional building has been purchased to provide new classrooms and a hall for the junior school. An area of the senior school has been partly rebuilt to add further facilities. A new multi-sports pitch has been built and improved information and communication technology (ICT) facilities provided across the whole school. The school has also purchased a building on the senior site for further development.

- 1.5 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used by the school for the EYFS and throughout this report to refer to year groups. The year group nomenclature used by the school from Year 1 and its NC equivalence are shown in the following tables.

***Junior School***

School	NC name
Preparatory	Year 1
Transition	Year 2
Lower I	Year 3
Upper I	Year 4
Upper II	Year 5
Lower III	Year 6

***Senior School***

School	NC name
Upper III	Year 7
Lower IV	Year 8
Upper IV	Year 9
Lower V	Year 10
Upper V	Year 11
Lower VI	Year 12
Upper VI	Year 13

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

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

- 2.1 The pupils' achievement and learning are exceptional. From the EYFS onwards, pupils are highly successful in their learning and personal development. The school fully meets its aim to empower girls to become confident, successful students, equipped to lead fulfilled and productive adult lives in a rapidly changing world. Pupils throughout the school consistently achieve to the highest academic standards, often culminating in the senior school with exceptional public examination results. Their skills and knowledge in all areas of learning and the many activities beyond the classroom are often beyond those expected for their age. Pupils, including those with SEND or EAL, make high levels of progress due to excellent teaching and a broad curriculum that encourages individuality and diversity. The school's focus on its own 'Abbey Learner Profile' (ALP), with emphasis on independent, creative and reflective learning, is successful in developing an aspirational ethos. Teachers and pupils share a mutual respect and have high expectations. The pupils' love of learning and desire to succeed are key factors in their exceptional achievement.
- 2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent. Pupils grow into self-confident and independent young people, supported by Christian values and an understanding of life in a multi-cultural environment. Supported by strong pastoral care and an emphasis on the individual, they have the opportunity to grow in self-esteem, be reflective and explore their own personal spirituality. Throughout the school pupils display high levels of moral understanding and have excellent social awareness. They understand the value and requirements of living in a happy, supportive school community. Excellent behaviour and support of one another are evident across all age groups. In accordance with the aim to enhance global understanding, many opportunities are provided to develop pupils' strong cultural awareness through their work in school and through support of varied charitable causes and trips abroad. A small number of pupils stated in interviews and in responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire that their views are not always heard. The inspection team found that a number of forums are available to share views and concerns and that the strong relationships between staff and pupils allow for the frequent sharing of ideas in an informal way. A few pupils who responded to the questionnaire felt that teachers do not always make sure they have the right amount of work to do. The inspection team investigated the amount of homework given to pupils across the school and found it to be appropriate, but also that combined with a busy extra-curricular programme time management for some pupils would be difficult.
- 2.3 Governance, leadership and management are of an excellent quality. The excellent educational experience and exceptional achievements are the result of strong management supported by an experienced governing body with a shared vision of what young people require to lead successful lives in the future. Governors fully understand their responsibilities, especially those regarding safeguarding and child protection. They provide a wide range of skill and experience and through strong and careful strategic planning promote success for the school's future. The provision of high quality staff, buildings and resources underpins the exceptional achievements and excellent personal development of the pupils. Management at all levels, including in the EYFS, is a strength of the school. Recent changes to the SLT have been successfully introduced and continue to promote a culture of high

expectations, exceptional achievement by pupils and an emphasis on care and concern for others. The quality of links between the school and parents is excellent. The school has been successful in meeting the recommendations of the previous inspection to improve ICT provision and encourage the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

2.4 The school meets 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. Ensure that opportunities are provided for junior pupils to further develop confidence to exercise their initiative and take responsibility for learning and decision making in all lessons.
2. Ensure that the senior school pastoral and academic systems are further developed to monitor the balance between the academic and the wider commitments of each pupil.
3. Develop each child's learning record as a consistent assessment tool throughout the EYFS.

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

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

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' achievements and learning is exceptional.
- 3.2 The school fulfils its aim to promote the pursuit of excellence by setting high expectations within and beyond the classroom and in achieving exceptional external examination results.
- 3.3 The overall quality and standards of the EYFS are excellent. The vast majority of children exceed national norms within the EYFS Profile at the end of Reception. Children in the Nursery are beginning to recognise some phonic sounds and numbers to 10, and Reception children are able to recognise numbers to 20 and use phonics to blend simple words. They independently use interactive whiteboards, digital cameras and laptops. Young children who have SEND are achieving at a level expected for their age.
- 3.4 Pupils in the junior school demonstrate high levels of knowledge, advanced understanding and considerable skills in all they do. They often demonstrate initiative and show a great sense of enjoyment in learning and in meeting intellectual, physical and creative challenges. Excellent literacy skills were observed in writing that was creative and exciting in many subjects. Pupils are confident and eloquent when speaking, and use well-developed vocabulary to express and clarify their ideas and feelings, as well as to ask perceptive questions. Pupils' application of mathematics and computing skills is advanced, and enhances their overall achievements, enabling them to think logically. Their personal organisational skills are considerable, managing many commitments both within and outside the school environment.
- 3.5 Pupils in the senior school show an excellent level of knowledge, understanding and skills across all subject areas. They communicate articulately and intelligently, affording due deference to others so that learning is enhanced by detailed and analytical discussion. Pupils show a ready willingness to work and think independently. They use ICT skills proficiently and work collaboratively in a mutually supportive context. Across all ages they display excellent logical reasoning and evaluation skills. Sixth-form pupils show an excellent ability to discuss critically and to evaluate the points of view of others before responding effectively. They discussed intelligently practical and moral issues associated with the use of atomic energy, and in philosophy demonstrated great skill in analysing linguistic meanings.
- 3.6 Pupils achieve outstanding success in extra-curricular activities. In the junior school they readily engage in physical activities with great success. Netball teams have enjoyed success at county level, while individual pupils have been selected to represent the county in hockey, swimming, tennis and archery. National representation for individual pupils has been achieved in synchronised swimming, diving and biathlon. Many pupils achieve high standards in music. The Year 6 chamber choir was runner up in the Barnardo's National Choral Competition, and the school's 'Somerleaze Singers' were awarded a national schools' music association gold award. Achievement at Grades 4 and 5 in Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music examinations and music scholarships to senior schools are frequent.

- 3.7 Senior pupils have considerable success in a wide range of activities. The Young Enterprise groups have an excellent record of performance in local and regional competitions, and large numbers of pupils complete the silver and gold levels of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE). Individuals and teams gain success in local and national competitions in a range of sporting activities, particularly netball and athletics. Many pupils across the school achieved excellent standards in the UK Maths Challenge and the Science Olympiad. The Creativity, Action, Service programme increases pupils' achievements; as one pupil said: 'It helps me to do things I wouldn't otherwise do'.
- 3.8 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2011 to 2013. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. With an average over this period of over 85% for A\* and A grades, results at GCSE have been well above the national average for girls in maintained schools and above that for girls in maintained selective schools. International GCSE (IGCSE) results overall have been higher than worldwide and UK norms. With an average of 89% for A\*, A and B grades, results at A level have been well above the national average for girls in maintained schools and above that for girls in maintained selective schools. In 2013, A-level results were exceptional in relation to the national average for girls in maintained schools and well above that for girls in maintained selective schools. Results in the International Baccalaureate (IB), with a 3-year average of 39 points out of a maximum of 45, have been exceptional in relation to the worldwide average and well above the UK average for the diploma programme. In 2014 there were further improvements in public examinations, with almost 90% of GCSE results graded A\* and A, and with 94% of A levels graded A\*, A and B.
- 3.9 This level of attainment, taken in conjunction with other inspection evidence and nationally standardised progress data, indicates that progress is high in relation to the national average for pupils of similar ability, both to GCSE and between GCSE and A level. Pupils of all ages and abilities were seen to make rapid progress in lessons. The pupils' attainment in the junior school cannot be measured in relation to average performance in national tests, but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be excellent in relation to national age-related expectations. This level of achievement indicates a high rate of progress in relation to pupils of similar ability, as seen in the scrutiny of pupils' work books, curriculum interviews with pupils and work seen in lessons. The achievement of pupils with SEND is in line with that of their peers, and that of the most able pupils was seen to be very high in the majority of lessons. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses almost all pupils and parents were pleased with the progress made.
- 3.10 Scholarships are offered to junior school pupils by the senior school. A significant number of pupils not progressing to the senior school gain scholarships and places at other local highly selective schools. Almost all sixth-form pupils are successful in gaining places on highly competitive courses at their first choice of university.
- 3.11 Pupils across the whole school, including the EYFS, exhibit outstanding attitudes to learning and show enjoyment and satisfaction in all that they do. The pupils' ability to work independently and creatively is excellent, and they are highly motivated and share an evident desire to succeed. Pupils are industrious and enquiring, and they possess excellent study habits. Across the whole school they enjoy a collaborative approach to learning and in sharing their discoveries willingly with their peers. They have high aspirations both in and outside the classroom and an excellent work ethic, with exemplary perseverance.

### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision**

- 3.12 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.13 The high standards of provision fully support the aims of the school to enable all pupils to embark on a lifelong learning journey and to be responsible citizens. The curriculum is broad, balanced and carefully designed to provide excellent coverage of mathematical, scientific, creative, aesthetic and practical areas of study. The extra-curricular provision for all ages includes an extensive choice of activities, clubs and trips. The school has implemented the ALP to focus both pupils and teachers on an aspirational ethos for learning and its positive impact is tangible throughout. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, all parents thought that their children are offered an appropriate range of subjects and areas of experience. The curriculum is suited to all ages and abilities across the school, including pupils with SEND or EAL, and especially for those who show a gift or talent in academic work, sport, music, creativity or emotional intelligence. It is effectively timetabled for all pupils.
- 3.14 The EYFS setting makes excellent provision in meeting the needs of the range of children who attend. The education programmes cover the seven areas of learning of the EYFS, and in addition, the skills within the ALP, with its emphasis on independent, creative and reflective learning. This enables all children, including those with SEND and those with EAL, to achieve high levels of development. The provision both indoors and out provides rich and varied learning experiences. In the Nursery, the children can choose from an excellent range of activities, including painting, cooking in the sand area and digital photography. The Reception children have ground grain to make flour and added water to make dough, used an art programme on laptops and learned how to follow instructions to make jam sandwiches. There is a suitable mix of adult-led and child-initiated activities, with staff sensitively developing and extending children's play and learning.
- 3.15 A good balance of learning activities is evident in the junior school, allowing pupils to develop skills and confidence. The ALP underpins and guides curriculum planning. This has recently been supplemented by an 'Outcome and Expectations' profile created for each year group which focuses on the development of skills and knowledge to reflect the needs of a rapidly changing world. Pupils develop thinking and creative skills through both the curriculum and additional workshops, often provided by teachers from the senior school. These workshops are also used to provide extra challenge for the most able pupils, alongside a range of focused group work and participation in activities such as the Primary Mathematics Challenge.
- 3.16 Up to and including Year 4, cross-curricular topics aid pupils in a better understanding of the world in which they are growing up. In Years 5 and 6, the school has created a bespoke curriculum in which the pupils benefit from being taught most subjects by specialist teachers. In this way, pupils are prepared for the specialist teaching within the senior school. Digital literacy is built into the whole curriculum and the teaching of modern foreign languages is a strong feature of the school's provision. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is well planned and its principles consciously integrated into the whole curriculum. The junior school successfully uses assessment to guide curriculum planning.
- 3.17 Throughout the senior school curricular provision promotes excellent learning and provides many opportunities to develop skills within a flexible and responsive framework. From Year 8 pupils have a good range of modern foreign languages,

along with options from a selection of subjects including Latin. The PSHE curriculum is varied, informative and engaging, with a wealth of opportunities for pupils to learn and develop leadership and thinking skills. The creative curriculum is varied and includes food technology, textiles, and art and design. A range of digital skills is taught within the curriculum, for example, photo manipulation in art and data handling in geography and economics. The curriculum supports pupils with SEND or EAL effectively, both within lessons and through withdrawal from lessons for specialist teaching. The most able pupils are supported by optional pathways from Year 9 onwards and by setting by ability for some subjects, and all study the philosophy of religion GCSE in Year 10.

- 3.18 In Years 10 and 11 there is a wide choice of subjects to study to GCSE and IGCSE. The sixth form provides A-level and IB qualification routes and both offer significant quality, variety and choice, with appropriate time allocation. Careers guidance is excellent and pupils are very positive about the assistance they receive for their progression into higher education and careers on leaving school.
- 3.19 Extra-curricular provision is of a high standard. A comprehensive programme challenges, inspires, supports and encourages pupils to aim high. In the junior school the number and range of out-of-school clubs and activities are a strong feature of the school's provision. This allows pupils the opportunity to extend the school day whilst developing intellectual, creative and physical skills outside the classroom. A well-planned programme of visits, both day and residential, enriches the curricular provision and enables pupils to make links between areas of learning, as in the case of the residential trip in Year 5, during which cross-curricular activities are undertaken. Links with the local community are forged through sport and music, and through such initiatives as charity work.
- 3.20 In the senior school many activities for younger pupils are organised and led by sixth-form pupils, for example the Year 7 pantomime, giving the senior pupils the opportunity to develop key organisational and leadership skills. Music and drama provide pupils with ample opportunity for performance and production, as evidenced by the large numbers of pupils involved with *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. Departmental 'drop-in' clinics help pupils with their academic progress, and a wide variety of clubs, including beginners' Chinese and chess, helps pupils to develop new skills. The medicine club is very effective in helping to prepare pupils who intend to follow a career in medicine. Learning is further enhanced through opportunities to enter national science and engineering competitions, field trips, organised visits to galleries and theatres, and many foreign trips, for example the recent visits to Iceland and Nepal. Pupils take part in a wide variety of sporting activities, making full use of the school's facilities. Competitive sports matches are played against local schools and at national level. Other opportunities for physical activity include diving, fencing, Columbian dance exercise, climbing and canoeing. The Young Enterprise and DofE programmes are thriving. The school organises a major local initiative for the Reading Refugee Support Group, where sixth-form and Year 11 pupils help children of asylum seekers with their homework.

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

- 3.21 The contribution of teaching is excellent.
- 3.22 Throughout the whole school, lessons are meticulously planned and very well taught at a pace that enables all pupils to make rapid progress and develop a secure understanding of the subject, and foster within the classroom a studious and hard-working atmosphere. The work set in lessons is appropriate in terms of volume and challenge. The pupils have a clear enjoyment of learning and behave in an exemplary manner. Teachers are visibly ambitious for their pupils, and in lessons they share a mutual respect.
- 3.23 In the junior school and EYFS lessons are largely exciting and a desire for learning is evident throughout. Motivated teachers engage inquisitive learners with challenging lessons that skilfully combine enjoyment with purpose. In the EYFS staff have high expectations of themselves and the children, and their methods and resources help to develop confidence, which ensures that children are motivated and eager to learn. Teachers throughout the junior school have good subject knowledge and pupils benefit from a range of teaching styles, the majority of which are highly successful. The use of specialist teachers enhances the quality of the lessons. Teachers' explanations are clear and they use questioning skilfully to allow the pupils the opportunity to engage in higher thinking skills. Pupils are encouraged to work both independently and collaboratively. In the very few lessons where they were not fully engaged it was due to a lack of opportunity for them to exercise initiative and responsibility for their own learning.
- 3.24 In the senior school, a significant number of teachers have exceptional subject knowledge and are an inspirational force to pupils in and beyond the classroom. In the most successful lessons pupils are active and reflective, and take responsibility for their own learning, and a range of exciting, purposeful extension work is set to challenge the most able. The very few lessons which were less successful were too teacher led, potentially restricting the progress of some more able pupils. Teaching in the sixth form is of a high standard. In all lessons mutual respect between pupils and teachers is clear. In those lessons observed which adopted a university seminar approach, the pupils were engaged, took excellent notes, and contributed intelligently and constructively to discussion and debate.
- 3.25 Throughout the school, pupils with EAL are fluent English speakers and need little support in the classroom. The majority of lessons incorporate or plan for extension work to challenge the very able pupils. The few pupils with SEND are very well catered for, for example in the provision of notes and tasks on yellow paper to minimise glare. In pre-inspection questionnaire responses, parents reported that they are satisfied with the help given to those with specific needs, and with the extension work provided for the more able.
- 3.26 A few pupils expressed in response to the questionnaire the view that teachers do not always make sure they have the right amount of work to do. The inspection team investigated the amount of homework given to pupils across the school and found it to be appropriate. Of those pupils interviewed, all agreed that the homework given by the school is reasonable on the whole. They did express, however, that combined with extra-curricular activities, time management is sometimes difficult and leaves them with little leisure time. The inspection team found that many of the pupils have busy schedules.

- 3.27 The teaching is very well supported by a wide range of excellent resources, including computer suites, interactive whiteboards and well-resourced libraries. In the junior school specialist facilities for art, music and science are well used to provide active learning opportunities, and pupils benefit from a literacy-rich setting, with informative displays creating a vibrant and stimulating environment. Digital technology is used effectively in some lessons, enabling pupils to develop their skills in research, writing, design, data manipulation and music. In the junior school, it is used for self- and peer assessment in many lessons, and in the sixth form pupils are encouraged to bring in their own digital devices.
- 3.28 Throughout the school, marking is informative, helpful and supportive, and enables pupils to make progress. Oral feedback in lessons is excellent and pupils trust their teachers to give them the appropriate guidance. In the EYFS, assessment is thorough and detailed. Staff regularly listen to, carefully observe and skilfully question children during activities. Tablet computers are used effectively to record observations and improve planning to enhance teaching and learning. In the junior school, a thorough system of formal assessment and tracking enables teachers to understand the pupils' capabilities and allows teachers to focus their planning on individual needs. In the senior school, standardised assessment and tracking data is made available and some departments use this well. The school keeps an updated and useful register of the most able pupils and those who have particular talents.
- 3.29 The recommendation of the previous inspection regarding ICT development has been met. The school has invested heavily in ICT since the previous inspection, providing a robust network and Wi-Fi throughout, and pupils and staff can access documents and applications from home. These developments have enabled ICT to be used more in lessons. The recommendation from the previous inspection to encourage the sharing of the most effective practice has also been met. A Learning Innovation Group has been formed in both the junior and senior schools. They meet regularly and share the most effective practice both in training and across departments. Peer observation is now a regular feature of school life, especially in the junior school, and staff are encouraged to observe lessons both within and outside their own departments. This has led to teachers embedding challenge successfully into lessons across the age range.

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

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

- 4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 The school is highly successful in meeting its aims to uphold and give opportunity for the development of a full range of personal qualities and to encourage positive values. Pupils have extremely well-developed and distinct personalities for their age, and show themselves to be self-confident and independent young people who clearly demonstrate the qualities of the ALP.
- 4.3 The pupils' spiritual awareness is excellent. In the junior school the weekly themed assemblies led by the head underpin the school's values and offer time for reflection. Pupils enjoyed exploring the meaning of hope at the beginning of the school year. Lessons in PSHE and religious education enable pupils of all faiths and those of no faith to find ways of exploring personal spirituality in a supportive and obviously enjoyable way. In a Year 5 lesson, pupils stated their opinion that a church is a place where the rich and the poor are equal. Senior school pupils are comfortable exploring their faith and that of others, and are accepting of others. They demonstrate Christian values and see them as relevant and meaningful to their richly multi-cultural pupil body. They are reflective and open minded, in line with the ALP, which they espouse enthusiastically, and they benefit from the opportunities offered to them in support of this, through assemblies and access to the chapel and chaplain. The introduction of the 'Stillness' programme allows pupils opportunities to be at one with their spiritual self, which they have embraced. They appreciate beauty and talent through their creative subjects, as well as trips to galleries, concerts and other performances.
- 4.4 The moral development of pupils is excellent. The majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire reported that pupils demonstrate high standards of behaviour. In the EYFS, children demonstrate good behaviour, show respect for each other and play together exceptionally well. Throughout, pupils have excellent moral sense, clearly understanding right and wrong, and the significance of fair play. Junior pupils show respect for the school's positive behaviour code on display in every classroom and in their planners, and senior school pupils clearly understand the high expectations of behaviour. In all years, pupils' self-esteem is enhanced by the pride they feel in their roles of responsibility, and they enjoy the challenge of involving themselves in charity work and fund raising within the school and the wider community. Numerous pupil-led initiatives in programmes, such as the homework club for refugees, display pupils' moral sense in action. Pupils demonstrate a high level of care for the environment through bodies such as the eco-committee. Demonstrating excellent insight into the significance of leadership and its moral implication, they eagerly volunteer their time to help others in and out of school. In the sixth form they learn from challenging each other about ethical and moral issues, as seen in theory of knowledge and philosophy of religion lessons.
- 4.5 Throughout the school pupils have excellent social awareness and enjoy a happy social interaction across all age groups. The relationships between pupils and staff show high levels of mutual care and respect. All the pupils spoken to during the inspection recognised importance in belonging to a happy community and a responsibility for looking after each other's welfare. Pupils are friendly to each other and enjoy the activities organised through the house system, which provide opportunities for them to understand the value of competition. In the EYFS, shared

activities and play prepare children extremely well for the transition to the next stage of their education. Elsewhere, pupils' enthusiasm for benevolence towards each other was demonstrated during a junior class assembly, with emphasis on smiling and random acts of kindness. Those who hold posts of responsibility do so with a sense of pride and sixth formers are very conscientious and proud of their role in the smooth running of the school. The much-valued 'buddy' systems in the junior and senior schools contribute significantly to the pupils' social development. Members of the school council demonstrate a strong social conscience and, during interviews, pupils enthusiastically reported that they are the focus of the school. Pupils' understanding of citizenship, British institutions and how communities operate effectively is significantly enhanced by topics within the curriculum, including democracy, disability, the EU and living in a global society. The opportunity to study for the IB in the sixth form promotes global citizenship, and the ALP creates resilient, inquiring, independent and caring young people wishing to make a difference in the world.

- 4.6 Throughout, pupils have an excellent cultural awareness and appreciate the diversity within the school, which allows them to explore other traditions in an open and creative way. Pupils understand the principles that underlie British values, and show excellent awareness of the values important to other cultures through interaction with their friends and extensive discussions in the classrooms. Pupils' cultural awareness is promoted by celebration of a wide range of religious festivals during the year and by the many opportunities to visit cultural sites at home and abroad. The strong links with several international schools offer the pupils the opportunity to learn about entirely different experiences. Global citizenship and internationalism have been whole-school targets that have led to theme days and enrichment activities, and the school won an International School Award in 2011 for commitment to international projects and educating pupils about cultures and traditions from around the world.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care**

- 4.7 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.8 The school places the education and welfare of the whole person at the heart of its provision for each pupil, and the aim of ensuring that each girl is known as an individual is very well met. Pastoral care is exceptionally well managed throughout the school.
- 4.9 The contribution of the early years provision to children's well-being is excellent. All staff are highly skilled in helping children form secure emotional attachments through the key person system. They give high priority to safety and support the children's growing understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy, for example by wearing high visibility vests and holding on to rings on a rope when moving between the sites. Form teachers in the junior school know the pupils in their care very well and arrangements for transition to the next class are effective. Monitoring of pastoral care issues is thorough: individual pastoral care files are maintained for each pupil as she progresses through the school. Built into the end of the day is a short session for the older pupils to catch up with their form teacher, which further strengthens the pastoral care and support provided.
- 4.10 In the senior school heads of year and the pastoral deputy head oversee and successfully monitor procedures for care. Form tutors, who know their pupils extremely well, provide an interesting and helpful programme of PSHE, covering

issues such as cyber-bullying, the misuse of drugs and alcohol, road safety and relationships. Speakers from outside agencies are brought into school to further enhance the programme.

- 4.11 Staff and pupils have strong relationships from the EYFS onwards, and girls confirmed that they feel safe and supported in school and would know who to approach with a concern. Good behaviour is constantly acknowledged and rewarded. Rules of conduct are understood by pupils and are widely displayed. An excellent reward system is in operation to recognise achievement, and successes of all kinds are celebrated in assemblies. These arrangements promote pupils' high self-esteem and sense that they are valued. Sanctions are consistently applied and the school has a robust approach to any incidents of bullying. In responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire a small number of parents commented on the handling of bullying. Inspectors found that in the few cases where bullying has been raised as an issue, the school's documentation shows that any incidents have been investigated thoroughly. Extensive support has been given when needed and the procedure is in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy. In interviews, pupils reported that any incidents of unpleasantness are quickly addressed.
- 4.12 A small minority of pupils stated in interviews and in their pre-inspection questionnaire responses that their views are not always heard. The inspection team found that there are a number of formal committees in which pupils may share concerns and views, including the school council and food council. The excellent relationship between staff and pupils also allows for an informal exchange of views.
- 4.13 Pupils are encouraged to live healthily and many opportunities are provided for them to enjoy exercise, both within physical education lessons and extra-curricular activities. School meals are of a good quality, balanced and nutritious.
- 4.14 Facilities for those with SEND are good and a suitable access plan keeps the provision for these pupils under review.

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

- 4.15 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is excellent.
- 4.16 The school is strongly committed to and highly successful in its concern for the welfare, health and safety of all members of its community. Comprehensive measures are taken to promote a safe and secure environment. A health and safety committee implements an effective policy and monitors areas of risk. Assessments of risk are thorough for all areas of the school and for visits off site. Where areas of particular concern are identified, appropriate safety measures are put in place, such as the painting of tree roots to highlight their presence and improving road safety measures around the school's city centre site. The safeguarding and welfare requirements of the EYFS are extremely well met.
- 4.17 Precautions to prevent the risk of fire are in place, and both drills and inspections are held regularly. A suitable audit of fire risk and the regular maintenance of fire equipment are completed by outside contractors. A number of staff have received appropriate fire training. Maintenance of the buildings and site is well managed.
- 4.18 Pupils' welfare is carefully managed and supported. Welfare policies are clear, implemented efficiently and reviewed annually by members of SLT and by the governing body. A secure portal contains the necessary records to ensure that staff are kept up to date with procedures and concerns. Consequently, pupils feel safe

and valued by well-informed staff. Particular attention is paid to safeguarding and child protection. Policies and procedures are thorough and monitored by a designated governor and the full governing body to ensure that any deficiencies are identified and quickly remedied. Child protection training for staff is updated at the required times and close links are maintained between the school and local welfare agencies.

- 4.19 Registration of the pupils is undertaken in an orderly and careful manner, and any absence is followed up quickly. The admission and attendance registers are appropriately maintained and stored. Good arrangements are in place for pupils who feel unwell during the day, including a well-equipped medical centre in the senior school and suitably trained first-aiders in the junior school. These are operated in conjunction with a comprehensive first-aid policy. Due care is taken to ensure the welfare, health and safety of those with particular needs in relation to SEND.

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

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

- 5.1 The quality of governance is excellent.
- 5.2 The governing body is highly successful in supporting the aims of the school and promoting the school's ethos of an integrated Christian community. Whilst building on the school's current strengths and success, governors have a clear and exciting vision for the future. Since the previous inspection their leadership, experience and support have improved the overall quality of education and have raised the academic standards to an exceptional level, whilst ensuring that the personal development of all pupils is excellent, including in the EYFS.
- 5.3 Governors have a varied range of expertise, including financial, legal, business and educational areas. There is a mix of long-standing and recently appointed governors and the parental body representation is highly valued. Staff are frequently invited to contribute to governors' meetings to report current educational developments. An extensive committee structure monitors the work of the senior management and provides focused support across the school. The committees review and evaluate their own effectiveness and change their focus as required: the aim to prepare pupils for the global workplace has resulted in transition from the education committee to the 'Leadership in Girls' Education' group. Strategic development planning is strong, with careful financial management exercised. Since the previous inspection governors have continued to extend the buildings, facilities and resources, and appoint high quality staff. School buildings are maintained effectively and responses to any issues raised by the health and safety committee are dealt with promptly.
- 5.4 Development planning is kept under constant review as governors prepare to take the school forward with a new head and a change in the structure of senior leadership in both the junior and senior sections. Excellent support is provided for the head and many governors are regular visitors to the school.
- 5.5 Acting as a corporate body, governors fully understand their legal responsibilities to the school and maintain strong oversight of policies and procedures, including safeguarding, and these are reviewed annually. The welfare, health and safety of pupils are reviewed at meetings each term and robust procedures are in place for child protection. An appointed governor for child protection maintains close contact with the school, and a report is presented to the governing body each term. Governors undergo training for their roles and all have received child protection training.

**5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.6 The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians, is excellent.
- 5.7 Throughout, leaders and managers at all levels are highly effective in advancing the school's aims and are particularly successful in promoting a culture of very high achievement by pupils, together with a pervading emphasis on care and concern for others. Leaders and managers encourage a strong spiritual ethos that is sensitive to a wide variety of cultural traditions, which permeates the life of the school and underpins the leadership's vision of a high-achieving, caring and outward-looking community. This vision is shared by staff, pupils and parents, and is an outstanding feature of the school.
- 5.8 The strategic development plan sets clear priorities and these are reflected in planning across the whole school. Since the previous inspection, the school has introduced Learning Innovation Groups in both the junior and senior sections and an academic committee to oversee the development of the curriculum. These groups have further helped to develop self-reflection and self-evaluation within the school community. The constant focus of leadership and management is to serve the needs and interests of the pupils.
- 5.9 Leadership and management in the EYFS are excellent. The pursuit of excellence is demonstrated by an ongoing and well-documented drive for continuous improvement in both practice and the achievements of the children, which is shared by staff. The strong leadership and development plan indicates a clear commitment to continuous improvement, whilst maintaining the strengths identified at the previous inspection.
- 5.10 Leadership and management in the junior school are very strong. The collaborative style of management involves all staff in the school improvement plan (SIP) to establish key areas of development for the year. These are evaluated throughout the year and targets are adjusted if necessary. The improvement of learning and teaching is always a key part of the SIP and the care of the pupils is of high priority. Policies and procedures are reviewed by all staff and feedback informs senior management of the changes required. Although some roles have recently changed in the junior school management team, stability has been maintained by ensuring that any changes have been thoughtfully planned and introduced in a structured way. Those in key roles of middle management, such as subject co-ordinators, ensure that pupils make high levels of progress in their learning. All subject co-ordinators have a development plan for their subjects. They maintain a thorough overview of academic standards, planning, support for teachers and pupils' transition between key stages. The management group observes lessons and staff peer observation is common. Communication between management and staff is efficient, with an effective balance of formal and informal methods. A significant amount of academic data is collected and used effectively to review the performance levels of pupils. Staff are kept aware of the particular strengths and talents of individual pupils.
- 5.11 In the senior school, the SLT provides excellent leadership. Middle management responsibilities are shared amongst heads of department and heads of year, who exercise appropriate supervision of their areas, subject to the oversight of senior managers. A well-established system of professional review is conducted by line

managers, including lesson observations. Opportunities are provided for middle managers who wish to develop their careers further to participate in strategic planning. The Learning Innovation Group allows all teachers to play a part in the development of the school's most effective practice in teaching and learning. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked centrally and the data distributed to departments to inform their planning. In these ways the leadership and management have established a firm foundation for future development.

- 5.12 The school appoints highly qualified staff throughout. Recent senior appointments have ensured that change and development are managed successfully, and many teachers reported feeling motivated and positive about recent developments initiated in both the junior and senior schools. Staff training needs are identified effectively throughout the school, including in the EYFS. These reflect areas identified in the appraisal programme for individual professional development and include whole-school targets set within the school development plan. Procedures to safeguard all pupils are rigorous, and all staff, governors and volunteers are trained in safeguarding procedures. Child protection procedures in the EYFS are thorough.
- 5.13 Welfare, health and safety procedures are efficiently managed. The checking procedures for ensuring the suitability of staff, volunteers and governors to work with children are secure and centrally recorded as required.
- 5.14 The quality of links between the school and parents is excellent and strongly supports the school's aims. Parents' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive, including the provision of information the school supplies. Parents feel involved in the life of the school. The active parents' association raises funds for equipment and resources. Social events attended by parents include an annual ball, and they are encouraged to help at occasions such as the Christmas fair. Parents have the opportunity to share in special events such as class assemblies, plays and concerts, and willingly support sports fixtures.
- 5.15 In the EYFS, parents appreciate the help for children to settle in quickly and feel that their children are very well cared for. Communication between home and school through day-to-day contact, email, newsletters and opportunities to come into school is excellent, and enables parents to engage fully in their children's education. In both the junior and the senior school many information evenings are held for parents. Information for the parents of new pupils is comprehensive. The *Gateway* newsletter is vibrant and details events in the life of the school. Other high quality publications include the *Magnolia Tree*, containing articles written by pupils. The school website provides useful information, including the school's strategic plan. The school has an appropriate complaints procedure and concerns from parents are dealt with sensitively.
- 5.16 Detailed reports and parents' evenings keep all parents well informed of their children's progress. Reporting to parents is highly effective, with full reports and interim report cards issued throughout the year. Reports are well balanced, and offer extensive feedback and guidance on ways for pupils to improve their subject skills and application.

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