



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ABBOT'S HILL SCHOOL

INTEGRATED INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Full Name of School	Abbot's Hill School
DfE Number	919/6000
Registered Charity Number	3110533
Address	Abbot's Hill School Bunkers Lane Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP3 8RP
Telephone Number	01442 240333
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Email Address	enquiries@abbotshill.herts.sch.uk
Head	Mrs Kerstin Lewis
Chair of Governors	Mrs Janet Mark
Age Range	3 to 16
Total Number of Pupils	450
Gender of Pupils	Mixed 3 to 5; Girls 5 to 16
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS): 37 11-16: 262 5-11: 151
Head of EYFS Setting	Miss Kathryn Twinn (Head of Junior Department)
EYFS Gender	Mixed (32 girls, 5 boys)
Inspection dates	24 Jan 2012 to 27 Jan 2012

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 March 2009.

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. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed through the following link: www.legislation.gov.uk. Search for Independent School Standards Regulations and enter date 2010, to find Schedule 1, Parts 1-7.

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

- (i) The Equality Act 2010 (including race, gender, special educational needs and disability).
- (ii) The School Standards and Framework Act 1998, banning corporal punishment.

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

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

The inspection of 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.

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. The grades used by ISI and Ofsted are different to 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 for Achievement the descriptor 'exceptional' is available in addition.** 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', 'satisfactory' 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, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited 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 Janet Pickering	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Jane Coles	Team Inspector (Senior Manager, IAPS school)
Miss Joanna Gay	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Claire Hamilton	Team Inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mrs Clare Margetts	Team Inspector (Director of Studies, ISA school)
Mr Simon Mozley	Team Inspector (Business Manager, GSA school)
Mrs Rosamund Walwyn	Co-ordinating Inspector for Early Years

CONTENTS

	Page
1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL	1
2 THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL	2
(a) Main findings	2
(b) Action points	3
(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements	3
(ii) Recommendations for further improvement	3
3 THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS	4
(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning	4
(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)	5
(c) The contribution of teaching	6
4 THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	8
(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils	8
(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care	9
(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety	9
5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	11
(a) The quality of governance	11
(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians	11

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Abbot's Hill school was founded in 1912 as a Church of England boarding school for girls and is now a day school for girls aged 3 to 16 and for boys in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The junior department, St Nicholas House, incorporates the EYFS setting and is on the same 76-acre site as the senior department, Baird House, for the 11-16 year old pupils. The whole school is a registered charity and a limited liability company. There is one governing body, composed of 10 members all of whom are trustees of the charity.
- 1.2 Within a Christian ethos and happy, supportive and caring environment, the school aims to enable pupils to develop their academic and personal potential to the full. Further aims are associated with encouragement of pupils' spiritual growth, development of their self-confidence, self-reliance, cultural awareness, compassion and social skills, and preparation of pupils for life beyond the school as responsible and caring members of a community.
- 1.3 Of the 450 pupils in the school, most are of white British origin and come from professional families. In the EYFS there are 32 girls and 5 boys, of whom 17 are part-time. There are 151 junior girls in Years 1 to 6 and 262 senior girls in Years 7 to 11. Of the 100 pupils identified by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), 71 receive specialist learning support; one pupil has a statement of special educational needs and there are nine pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL), none of whom require specialist support.
- 1.4 There are no formal assessments, interviews or testing arrangements for entry into the EYFS. Girls registered for entry into Years 1 to 6 attend a taster day and an assessment day, and reports are obtained from their present school. Entry into Year 7 is by the school's own entrance tests and reports from the current school. Scholarships and means-tested bursaries are available. Most junior pupils transfer to the senior department and constitute approximately two-thirds of the Year 7 intake. All Year 11 pupils leave to continue their education in maintained, selective or independent schools. The ability profile of the junior department is above the national average, with a fairly wide spread of abilities represented. The ability profile of the senior department is also above the national average, with most pupils having an ability that is at least above average, and few having an ability that is below average.
- 1.5 Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors has been appointed together with a new vice chair and three other members of the governing body; other recent appointments include a human resources manager and a marketing professional and, in the senior department, a new head and two assistant heads with separate curriculum and pastoral responsibilities.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 Pupils are well educated and the school successfully fulfils its aim of being inclusive, valuing and supporting each individual, in a culture of praise, encouragement and support. The quality of pupils' academic achievement and progress throughout the school is good. GCSE results are above the national average for maintained schools. Individual needs of pupils across the ability and age range are identified; there are insufficient opportunities for stretching and challenging gifted and talented pupils but there is excellent provision for those with SEND. The academic curriculum is broad and each year cohort is treated individually, when setting pupils within academic subjects. Small class sizes across the school enable pupils to receive individual attention and the teaching staff in the senior department willingly provide extra one-to-one tutorial support in response to requests from pupils. Inconsistency in marking and assessment, and lack of variety of teaching styles, in all year groups, hinders pupils' overall progress. The extra-curricular programme ensures opportunity and choice for all and is much appreciated by pupils. Pupils' excellent attitude to their learning contributes significantly to their progress and achievement.
- 2.2 The quality of pupils' personal development is outstanding. They take good advantage of opportunities on offer both within and outside the classroom. In line with the school's aims, pupils are confident, mutually supportive, pleasant, respectful, caring and happy. They enjoy excellent relationships with peers and adults alike and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The constitution of the 'clans' exemplifies the inclusive nature of the school community and the pastoral care of pupils is outstanding. Pupils feel safe, well known and well supported; they have a choice of individuals to turn to with any concerns.
- 2.3 Governance is good overall but monitoring of policies and procedures is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that governors always fully discharge their responsibilities. Leadership and senior management across the school are caring and accessible and a clear and comprehensive plan for school improvement has been developed. Examples of excellent middle management exist but sharing of good practice at this level does not yet extend across all academic departments or junior years. The school maintains effective links with parents. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, parents were appreciative of the range of subjects and extra-curricular activities, and the standard of care offered by the school.
- 2.4 Since the previous inspection in 2009, in both junior and senior departments, the timetable has been restructured, new senior management posts have been established and the curriculum has been extended. The recommendations in the previous inspection report have been addressed, although senior management in the junior department and provision for the most able pupils are not yet fully developed.

2.(b) Action points**(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is available through the link described in the Preface)

- 2.5 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Ensure consistency in the generation and use of assessment data within all departments and year groups to inform tracking of pupils' progress.
 2. Strengthen monitoring procedures to ensure the highest quality of teaching and learning across the school.
 3. Strengthen senior management in the junior department.
 4. Develop reporting arrangements in the EYFS to accurately record children's progress against the early learning goals and assessment scales.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

- 3.1 The overall achievement of the pupils is good.
- 3.2 Pupils of all ages demonstrate good levels of understanding, knowledge and skill in a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular activities. The outcomes for children in the EYFS are good. They are happy, secure, willingly engage in a broad range of activities and consequently achieve well across all six areas of learning. From a range of starting points they develop in ways which are generally above average for their age, particularly in areas of personal development and in their acquisition of literacy skills. Across the school, small classes, in which pupils feel well-known and supported, enable them to fulfil their potential, in accordance with the school's aims. The provision for pupils with SEND is very good. Provision for those pupils identified as gifted and talented has improved, as recommended in the previous inspection report, but opportunities for appropriate challenge at all ages are not yet fully embedded across the curriculum.
- 3.3 Confident and articulate pupils readily engage others in conversation, express themselves with maturity, and listen sympathetically and empathetically. Literacy skills are good at all levels; in the EYFS children learn to read and decode simple texts using phonic skills and they also develop early skills in joined handwriting and are eager to use these in child-initiated activities. In the junior department, pupils in an English lesson demonstrated their strong vocabulary. Independent learning in the junior department is encouraged through timetabled lessons in thinking-skills from Year 1 upwards. The success of the senior department programme of study skills in assisting pupils' independent learning was more evident in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. In the EYFS, children learn to count accurately, use and recognise coins, do simple calculations and use computers independently. Numeracy skills in Years 1 to 6 are good, with weekly opportunities for problem solving and interpretation of graphical data. In the senior department, mathematical skills are sound but there are fewer opportunities for their cross-curricular application. Achievements in creative subjects across the school are excellent, with outstanding work seen in art and design, and drama. Collaboration between departments, with input from senior pupils, resulted in stunning props and scenery for a production of *The Tempest*, for which pupils had also composed the music.
- 3.4 The inclusive ethos of the school enables pupils of all abilities to participate in extra-curricular activities and represent the school in a range of academic, musical, dramatic and sporting events. In the EYFS, children learn to play imaginatively, initiating their own games in the role play areas or with the available resources. Pupils regularly achieve representation at county and regional level in sport; junior and senior pupils achieve well in music examinations; Year 7 pupils achieve success in speech and drama examinations; and almost all Year 10 pupils successfully participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme. Academic, drama and music scholarships are frequently awarded to pupils transferring to schools at the end of Year 11.
- 3.5 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2008 to 2010. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. GCSE performance has been high in relation to the national average for maintained schools and in 2011, 59 per cent of the grades awarded were at A* or A. Junior pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance against

national tests, but on the evidence available from lesson observations, work scrutiny, tracking data and interviews, it is judged to be good in relation to national age-related expectations. The level of attainment across the school indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. Pupils with SEND receive excellent support and make appropriate progress, at all ages, in relation to their ability. Throughout the school pupils make good progress in relation to their age and ability, including those with SEND, although opportunities for challenging the most able are not yet fully developed.

- 3.6 Pupils' very positive attitude to learning is a significant factor in their achievement. From the EYFS upwards, they are eager to learn, show good powers of concentration and work well individually and collaboratively.

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

- 3.7 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is good.
- 3.8 The well-balanced curriculum, covering all the required areas of learning, makes a good contribution to pupils' achievements and development and supports the school's aim of enabling each pupil to develop their potential and achieve success. The provision for pupils with SEND is very good. Provision for those pupils identified as gifted and talented has improved, as recommended in the previous inspection report, but opportunities for appropriate challenge at all ages are not yet fully embedded across the curriculum.
- 3.9 In the EYFS, the needs of children are well met and the curriculum is suited to the individual. Core subjects are delivered across all age groups with an emphasis on numeracy, literacy and teaching of French from an early age. In addition to the benefit of small class sizes across the school, all pupils from Years 1 to 9 have timetabled thinking and study skills lessons to support the work done across the curriculum. In the junior department, information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to support other subjects and the outdoor space is well used to enhance areas of the curriculum. Enrichment activities, such as the toy bricks workshop for Years 3 to 6, provide opportunities for cross-curricular links and personal development. Music and physical education (PE) provide a breadth of experience through access to specialist facilities with all Year 3 girls learning to play a range of instruments through the 'Music Roundabout'.
- 3.10 The senior department curriculum includes French and Spanish in Years 7 to 9 and creative subjects are well represented and enjoyed by the girls. An evaluation of the ability profile of each year group informs the appropriateness of setting in a number of subjects, enabling individual needs to be addressed within each cohort. At GCSE, all pupils take at least one modern foreign language and short-course religious studies (RS) with three separate sciences available for more able girls. Pupils can freely choose options from a wide range of subjects and therefore focus on their strengths and achieve well in relation to their ability. Media studies is a new GCSE option and the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course is now taken beyond Year 8. However, application of ICT skills across the curriculum was not evident in pupils' work in most subjects. Personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is timetabled throughout the school and promotes the school's aim of providing pupils with opportunities to develop the essential skills of life and understand the world in which they live. In the junior department the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme aids emotional development and

in Years 10 and 11 PSHE lessons include careers advice, enabling pupils to make appropriate choices for the next stage of their education.

- 3.11 The academic curriculum is supported by a wide range of extra-curricular activities which provide opportunities for pupils' personal, social, physical and creative development in line with the school's aims. Many sporting and musical activities, such as the multi-activity sports club and school choirs, are available to the full range of abilities and ages. In line with a recommendation in the previous inspection report, there has been an improvement in the provision of extra-curricular activities in Years 1 to 4, enabling girls to have a more varied and stimulating experience. In the senior department, drama productions are a particular strength and are enthusiastically supported by a large number of pupils. Activities such as the DofE scheme provide opportunities for girls to support the local community through volunteering. A range of local charities are supported, together with national and international causes. Whole-school events such as the 'Girls Go Green' week are well supported and benefit the wider community. The EYFS learning environment, both inside and outside, is spacious, well planned and resourced, and safely organised to provide many opportunities for exploration and child-initiated activities.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.12 The contribution of teaching is good.
- 3.13 Teaching is successful in promoting pupils' progress and supporting the school's aim to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teaching across the school is sensitive to the needs of individuals, and to their varying circumstances, abilities and stages of development. Junior pupils are set by ability in mathematics and English, and in the senior department each year group is treated as unique, and setting in individual subjects varies accordingly supporting pupils' achievement in line with their age and ability. In the junior department, marking is mostly thorough and often includes words of encouragement and praise; in the best examples, teachers give guidance for improvement and the opportunity for pupils to assess their own performance. Junior pupils commented that teachers' written and verbal comments helped them to understand how to improve and progress in their work. In the senior department, the quality and frequency of marking varies between, and within, academic departments. High quality marking was seen, for example, in English and art, with targets set and opportunities provided for regular review. In some other areas, departmental marking policies are not followed and marking does not provide sufficient guidance for improvement. Where marking is comprehensive and constructive, it is clearly appreciated by pupils. Although assessment and tracking procedures are in place, there are inconsistencies in the collection and use of assessment data by teachers and managers across the school. The data is being used well to monitor the progress of pupils with SEND but has yet to be used effectively to monitor the progress and achievement of all pupils and year groups. In the EYFS, systems for assessing and tracking the children's progress are developing well and there are usually clear links between assessments and planning for the next stage in a child's learning.

- 3.14 Across the school, teachers' secure subject knowledge enables them to plan appropriate lessons for pupils of different ages and abilities. The use of specialist teaching in some subjects, for example, in French, PE and music from the nursery upwards, enhances the pupils' learning experience. As recommended in the previous inspection report, the junior department has extended opportunities for pupils' analytical and independent thinking and this is beginning to have an impact on the overall quality of teaching and learning. Across the school, in the best lessons, time is well managed and resources are used effectively to provide all pupils with varied and stimulating activities that foster their interest and give them opportunities to work independently, collaboratively and creatively. In the few less successful lessons, progress is limited by slow pace and lack of challenging and interesting tasks. In the senior department, a widespread lack of punctuality is not always challenged by teachers and hinders the start of lessons which then, frequently, do not finish on time. The teaching is very well supported by the classroom assistants in the junior department and the technicians in the senior department and their roles are highly valued by teaching staff and pupils alike.
- 3.15 In all parts of the school, teaching very successfully supports pupils with SEND. Learning Zones in both the junior and senior departments provide a positive learning environment for pupils with SEND, who speak highly of the individual support they are given. They present as confident and positive learners, regardless of their particular needs. Opportunities to challenge the most able are developing but are not yet fully embedded across the school.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The quality of spiritual, moral, social, and cultural education is excellent.
- 4.2 The school meets its aim to develop pupils' self-confidence and social skills in a happy, caring and supportive environment. Pupils are confident and articulate; they readily express their views and are emotionally mature for their age. A well-planned programme of RS lessons and assemblies makes an effective contribution to pupils' spiritual development in line with the Christian ethos of the school. Pupils explore different values and beliefs; for example, in a Year 8 RS lesson they discussed Islam and Christianity. Music is used well to promote spiritual awareness and prayer is an integral part of assemblies which are led thoughtfully and engagingly. In line with the community ethos, pupils participate eagerly and confidently in assemblies and their academic and personal achievements are celebrated.
- 4.3 From the earliest age, a sense of responsibility and politeness is encouraged; pupils know right from wrong, they readily accept the codes of conduct and their behaviour is exemplary. In the EYFS, children willingly take on responsibility for keeping the classroom tidy and orderly. They learn to work with one another cooperatively and to share resources such as computers. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a significant number of pupils felt that teachers were not always fair in the way that they give rewards and sanctions, but inspectors found no evidence to support these views. In the junior department, all Year 6 pupils have a post of responsibility and leadership and there are many such opportunities for Years 10 and 11, including the roles of clan captains and prefects. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, pupils in other year groups expressed a desire for more chances to take on responsibility. Pupils have respect for the environment and a good understanding of ethical issues, as seen in a Year 10 history lesson. Senior pupils support those in the junior department and a caring approach is engendered across the school. Pupils help those less fortunate than themselves through the service element of DofE and they raise money for many causes, including a project in Zambia. Social, political and economic awareness is developed through the PSHCE programme and trips, for example by Year 6 to the Houses of Parliament.
- 4.4 Excellent relationships, between staff and pupils and amongst pupils, are at the heart of the success of the school. Junior pupils love 'circle time'. PSHCE lessons include friendship and relationship issues, and the SEAL programme, focusing on social and emotional development, has been successfully implemented in the junior department and is being introduced in the senior department. All pupils and all teaching and support staff belong to one of the three pupil-led 'clans' and there are many opportunities to participate in a range of excursions, for example, the Year 8 residential trip to the Isle of Wight.
- 4.5 The school promotes a wide range of cultural activities such as music, drama and dance in all year groups. Senior girls develop an awareness of their own culture, and that of others, through museum, gallery and theatre visits. The catering department not only fosters a caring and friendly approach but embraces international cuisine, for example, a special buffet to celebrate Chinese New Year. Regular trips and visits enhance pupils' cultural awareness, for example, the participation of junior pupils in an 'Apache Art' workshop; Years 7 and 9 visits to a Hindu temple and the battlefields at Ypres, respectively; and senior pupils' residential trip to Spain.

- 4.6 Pupils have an excellent standard of personal development at the end of each transitional stage in the school.

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

- 4.7 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.8 Pastoral care is a strength of the school. In all areas of the school, hardworking, committed, and caring staff provide very effective support and guidance for pupils in accordance with the school's aims. There are very positive relationships between staff and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves across the whole school community, together with an inclusive attitude to all pupils and adults, whatever their role or position in the school.
- 4.9 Pupils in all areas of the school are encouraged to be healthy and take exercise. They learn about healthy eating through the SEAL programme and in science lessons and they spoke very positively about the delicious range of snacks and meals provided at breaks and lunchtimes. Pupils enjoy regular exercise through PE lessons, games fixtures and extra-curricular activities.
- 4.10 The school is extremely effective in promoting good behaviour and guarding against harassment and bullying. The code of conduct is well understood by all pupils and the recently introduced 'ABC' programme helps junior pupils reflect on any inappropriate behaviour and decide on the best way forward. In the EYFS, children readily approach known adults if they need help and develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. The pastoral needs of other pupils are extremely well met by class teachers or tutors, supported by heads of year in the senior department.
- 4.11 The school has a suitable three-year plan to improve educational access for pupils with special needs or disabilities.
- 4.12 In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a significant number of pupils felt the school did not ask for, and respond to, their opinion. However, inspectors found effective systems in place to ensure that the views of pupils are heard and properly considered. Junior and senior pupils spoke positively about expressing their views through the two school councils and gave examples of consequent changes being made. In addition, worry boxes enable junior pupils to express any concerns anonymously.

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

- 4.13 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is good.
- 4.14 Throughout the school pupils' welfare is promoted effectively, the protection of children is carefully ensured and safeguarding arrangements have regard to official guidance. All staff receive regular training in this area and the two designated, and one deputy, safeguarding officers have been trained in child protection and inter-agency working. The governor with designated oversight over child protection meets termly with the designated officers to discuss safeguarding issues, and other governors are trained in child protection.
- 4.15 The school has comprehensive policies covering all required aspects of health and safety including measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. Regular fire drills are held and members of staff receive appropriate fire awareness training.

Comprehensive risk assessments cover all areas of school life for pupils of all ages, including trips and visits at home and overseas, and there are effective accident-reporting procedures.

- 4.16 Arrangements to ensure health and safety are very effective and include good provision in the school surgery for pupils who are ill or injured. Medical records are appropriately stored and first aid boxes are located around the site and are very well maintained. The first aid policy is clear and comprehensive and there is regular training for all staff in first aid and the use of emergency epinephrine autoinjectors.
- 4.17 Since the previous inspection, there have been significant improvements in health and safety awareness and practice across the school with much closer monitoring of health and safety by governors as recommended in the 2009 report. All specified actions to meet regulatory requirements at the time of the previous inspection were addressed promptly and there is an ongoing programme of development in the area of health and safety, including installation of door key pads and sight panels.
- 4.18 Admission and attendance registers are properly maintained, and correctly backed up for the previous three years. Absences are followed up efficiently.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is good.
- 5.2 The governors are highly committed to the success of the school and fully supportive of its aims. The governing body has a good range of professional expertise, including education, finance, legal, property and medical skills. Ten subcommittees address all areas of school life and regular reports from these, and from the head, enable governors to gather the information they need to support planning and to evaluate the work of the school. Governors are less familiar with the EYFS setting than with other areas of the school. An annual strategy day enables governors to review the school improvement plan and the long-term vision for the school.
- 5.3 The chair of governors holds separate weekly meetings with the head and bursar, and is a frequent visitor to the school. Governors hold an annual meeting with staff, attend school functions and are invited to school in-service training (INSET) sessions, including child protection. The chair has completed safer recruitment training. In addition, governors attend Association of Governing Bodies in Independent Schools and other meetings in order to keep up to date with their various responsibilities. New governors have completed necessary recruitment checks, receive effective induction and a comprehensive induction pack, and are provided with training relevant to specific roles.
- 5.4 Governors take their responsibilities seriously and there is an annual review of safeguarding and child protection arrangements throughout the school. However, review of policies and procedures, to ensure that governors are fully effective in discharging their responsibilities, is insufficiently monitored.

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

- 5.5 The quality of leadership and management is good overall.
- 5.6 The executive team, which comprises the headmistress, the heads of senior and junior departments and the bursar, has established, and continues to enhance, the caring and inclusive ethos in line with the school's aims. The appointment of a new head of the senior department, and two assistant heads with separate curriculum and pastoral responsibilities has helped to strengthen and clarify reporting lines. The senior management team in the junior department now includes the head of inclusion and the head of EYFS. Their roles have been clarified, as recommended in the previous inspection report but the junior head has insufficient support at senior management level. The executive and both senior management teams are approachable and accessible and their passion and commitment to the school are evidenced by the strong pastoral care and personal development of pupils across the school. Leadership and management of the EYFS are good; policies are usually comprehensive but do not always reflect the current practices. However, all children in the EYFS have equal opportunities to succeed and are safeguarded. There are useful links with other agencies, staff and other resources are well deployed and there is a developing sense of teamwork. Self-evaluation in the EYFS is accurate, identifying strengths and areas for development and demonstrating the capacity to make continuous improvement.

- 5.7 Effective measures are in place to ensure that suitable and well-qualified staff are appointed across the school and appropriately trained in safeguarding children and welfare, health and safety. There is an appraisal system and opportunities for professional development for teaching and support staff across the school. In the senior department the assistant heads share an office, which facilitates a coordinated approach, linking curriculum and pastoral issues. Regular meetings are held with heads of year and with heads of academic department. In the junior school there is a lack of clarity regarding the roles of subject coordinators and links between the junior and senior school are not consistently well developed. Management of pastoral care is consistently good in all areas of the school.
- 5.8 There are examples of excellent departmental management in the senior school. However, lack of monitoring and sharing of good practice leads to inconsistencies in middle management across the curriculum. Some good departmental leadership of teaching and learning is not disseminated as there are few opportunities to share best practice. Whole-school INSET has addressed independent learning but full and comprehensive monitoring of teaching and learning across departments and across the age range of the school is not yet fully implemented. The identification of pupils with SEND and the monitoring of their progress and achievements are highly effective. Management of finance and support staff is good, and the administrative staff are highly effective, resulting in a clean, well-maintained, well-fed, well-ordered and happy community.
- 5.9 In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, parents expressed particular satisfaction with the range of opportunities offered by the school and the support provided for their children. Some parents did not agree that the school deals well with cases of bullying. The inspectors found highly effective procedures in place and the pupils commented that they felt that incidents were dealt with appropriately and swiftly.
- 5.10 The quality of communication from the school is good with half-termly newsletters available through the website and frequent communications via email. The school's open-door policy provides many opportunities for parents to meet staff face to face and staff make prompt contact when there is an issue to discuss with parents. The school handles concerns with care in accordance with its published procedures.
- 5.11 Parents have many opportunities to come in to school, for example, the executive team hosts coffee mornings for parents of senior girls and the head of the junior department invites different parents in every week. The parents' association is very strong and has recently been formalized with a new constitution and committee. There are two formal meetings a year which are also attended by the executive team and an extensive programme of events is open to all parents, ranging from the Christmas Fair and quiz nights to the spring fashion show and the summer ball. In the junior department, parents are invited to help with cookery lessons and sewing. Parents also have good opportunities to be involved with their children's work and progress. Areas in senior pupils' study diaries encourage communication between parents and form tutors. There are regular parents' evenings and parent information evenings covering topics such as cyber bullying. Many parents attend school concerts and drama performances and support sports fixtures.
- 5.12 Parents of pupils of all ages and of prospective pupils are provided with useful information about the school in the form of high quality handbooks and prospectuses. GCSE options booklets and information for all transitional stages are also produced. Policies are available on the website and in hard copy on request.

Parents receive comprehensive reports and grade cards at intervals throughout the school year which contain details of effort, attitude and progress and, in the older year groups, targets for improvement. Leaders in the EYFS have developed close working relationships with parents, who expressed particular satisfaction with the generous amount of time given for progress reports and parent consultations.

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