



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**DEAN CLOSE SCHOOL**

**STANDARD INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Dean Close School

The preparatory and pre-preparatory schools were inspected at the same time and separate reports published.

Full Name of School	<b>Dean Close School</b>		
DfE Number	<b>916/6035</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>1086829</b>		
Address	<b>Dean Close School Shelburne Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL51 6HE</b>		
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Fax Number	<b>01242 258003</b>		
Email Address	<b>office@deanclose.org.uk</b>		
Headmaster	<b>Mr Jonathan Lancashire</b>		
Chair of Trustees	<b>Mrs Patricia Napier</b>		
Age Range	<b>13 to 19</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>496</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (260 boys; 236 girls)</b>		
Numbers by Age	<b>13-19:</b>	<b>496</b>	
Number of Day Pupils	<b>Total:</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>Capacity for flexi-boarding: 37</b>
Number of Boarders	<b>Total:</b>	<b>237</b>	
	<b>Full:</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>Weekly: 0</b>
Inspection dates	<b>20 Sep 2011 to 21 Sep 2011</b>		
	<b>17 Oct 2011 to 19 Oct 2011</b>		

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in October 2005.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010\*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

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

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

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

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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

The inspection of boarding was not carried out in conjunction with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills, and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report refers to an inspection in November 2008 and can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) under Children's social care/Boarding school.

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

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

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Founded as a boys' school in 1886 on Evangelical Christian principles, Dean Close was named after the Very Reverend Francis Close, Dean of Carlisle, and a former Rector of Cheltenham. The school remains on its original 50-acre site on the outskirts of Cheltenham. Girls were first admitted into the sixth form in 1967 and throughout the school in 1972. This school is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The elected council of members, a body of supporters and friends of the school, elect in turn the trustees, who hold proprietorial responsibility. Separate preparatory and pre-preparatory schools are situated on a nearby site under the same governance arrangements as the senior school.
- 1.2 Dean Close is a Christian school and community which aims to uphold the Christian faith as a positive force for all, including those who do not share this faith. The school aims to treat every member of its family as unique and equally valuable; it seeks to challenge selfishness, and holds community, respect for others, relationship and service at the heart of the school. Dean Close welcomes pupils with a broad range of abilities, aiming to give each and every one a well-rounded education, blending good academic performance with real achievement in their individually-discovered talents. It aims to encourage independent thinking and the self-confidence to challenge the *status quo*.
- 1.3 The school currently educates 496 pupils (260 boys and 236 girls), of whom 237 are boarders and 222 are in the sixth form. Eighty-six come from families where English is an additional language (EAL), such as from Hong Kong, China, Russia, Brunei and Germany. Of these, 30 are provided with specialist English language support. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs, and the school has identified a further 78 pupils with special educational needs and/or abilities (SEND). Of these, 48 receive formal learning support.
- 1.4 Pupils take a range of aptitude and ability tests on entering the school in Year 9, and on entry to the sixth form. These indicate that the ability profile is above the national average, and slightly higher in Years 9 to 11 than in the sixth form.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following tables.

School	NC name
Fourth Form	Year 9
Remove	Year 10
Fifth Form	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13

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

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

- 2.1 Dean Close is highly successful in meeting its stated aims, sustaining a challenging and fulfilling education from which pupils make the most of their opportunities. Pupils' achievement is good, and they make particularly good progress compared with others of similar ability. Their subject knowledge and understanding are good, although their competence in working with computer applications is inconsistent and sometimes under-developed. Examination results have been at least in line with those of maintained selective schools over the last few years. Pupils display good learning skills and show excellent attitudes to their work. They achieve significant success in a wide variety of activities, events and competitions. These standards are significantly enhanced by the good quality of teaching and the curriculum, particularly the excellent extra-curricular programme and the good provision for those receiving learning support or with English as an additional language (EAL). However, curricular provision for science at GCSE limits pupils' future options, and the quality of some marking shows significant variation.
- 2.2 Pupils of all ages show outstanding personal development, and exhibit very strong spiritual and moral awareness, and excellent social responsibility. Pupils show tolerance and respect for each other and staff, and display initiative, excellent standards of behaviour, and a concern for others. Pupils respond very well to the excellent pastoral care, support and guidance they receive. Their sense of security and well-being is enhanced by good arrangements to promote their safeguarding, welfare, health and safety. The boarding experience makes a highly valuable and much appreciated contribution to pupils' education and development.
- 2.3 The governance of the school is strong, and trustees exert very effective control of the school's finances and contribute significantly to ensuring its continued development. Leadership and management at all levels are good, enabling high levels of success by pupils and significant development of their personal qualities. Systems to evaluate academic areas are currently sharper than those used to assess pastoral routines and provision. All recruitment checks are carried out promptly on all staff and trustee appointments and recorded as required. The school has developed a strong and effective partnership with parents, who responded very positively to the pre-inspection questionnaire, and expressed high levels of satisfaction with the school, especially with the range of subjects and educational experiences and the promotion of worthwhile attitudes and values. Pupils also responded positively to their questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of those responding saying that they liked being at school, and that they felt they were making good progress. The school has responded appropriately to all the recommendations of the previous education and boarding welfare inspections.

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

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

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Ensure that all pupils have sufficient information and communication technology (ICT) competence to support and enhance their learning.
  2. Widen the opportunities offered for science at GCSE, to avoid excessive early specialisation and its implication for future careers.
  3. Address the variability and inconsistency in marking practices to raise standards to those of the best, so that all pupils are clear about the next steps in their learning.

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

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

- 3.1 Pupils' achievement overall is good across the school, and they are very well educated in line with the school's aim to provide pupils with a body of knowledge of lasting value. Pupils develop good subject knowledge at a level appropriate to their age and ability. They can recall and explain, for example, the causes of major historical events and natural phenomena, recognise similarities and differences in the information presented to them, and can identify patterns and draw conclusions. They apply their existing body of knowledge to new situations, and use appropriate technical language and terminology. Speaking and listening skills are often excellent, and pupils write effectively and accurately. They apply number skills well in a range of different subjects. Pupils are generally confident users of ICT but the skills of some in using a wide range of computer applications are under-developed, because the school has no system to assess their level of competence and respond to it. Pupils' creative ability is strongly evident in art, music and drama in particular. When given the opportunity to do so, pupils develop initiative and an independent approach to learning, although such opportunities are not widespread. They display competent practical skills in science, although these often involve the accurate following of instructions, rather than independently planning and carrying out their own investigations.
- 3.2 Over the last few years, results at GCSE and A level have been consistently good, being above the national average for all maintained schools, and at least in line with the average for maintained selective schools. In the last two years, six out of ten grades at GCSE have been at A\* or A, and three-quarters of those at A level have been at A\* to B. These results, interpreted in the light of other inspection evidence, indicate that pupils make particularly good progress compared with others of similar ability. This is supported by standardised measures of progress which have been above national norms. Pupils receiving learning support and those with EAL make especially good progress, shown by their rate of improvement in standardised tests and other specialist examinations.
- 3.3 Pupils achieve excellent levels of success in their extra-curricular activities and in other competitions and events. These range from sporting success at regional and national level, and awards in music, drama and public speaking, to their performance in combined cadet force (CCF) competitions and other arduous pursuits. The most able pupils achieve very well in the many academically-challenging extension activities in which they take part, and are successful in securing places at many of the most competitive UK and overseas universities.
- 3.4 Pupils demonstrate good learning skills across the school. They show excellent behaviour and attitudes to work. They are keen to do well, and work hard to achieve success in whatever endeavour they are committed to. They are inquisitive, and ask interesting and thoughtful questions, and the most able explain their thinking processes well and show good analytical and reasoning skills, many performing at a high level in the school's critical essay competition. Pupils work very well in groups and teams, showing perseverance and effort. As they move up through the school, pupils gradually acquire the critical skills to evaluate new ideas and, where appropriate, to challenge old ones.



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

- 3.5 The good curriculum makes a highly effective contribution to the success enjoyed by the pupils, and has many strong features. It enables the school to meet its stated aim of offering a challenging and balanced academic education. The extra-curricular provision is excellent and provides a diverse and stimulating complement to the taught provision. Since the previous inspection the school has made some progress in enhancing curriculum provision, although arrangements for ICT and science at GCSE level do not fully meet the needs of all pupils. The school has responded appropriately to the recommendations made and has already embarked on an ambitious and wide-ranging curriculum review.
- 3.6 The taught curriculum covers a broad range of core and optional subjects enabling good choice for pupils, while generally giving them appropriate experience in a broad range of subject disciplines. The provision and timetable are suitably flexible both at GCSE and A level, in response to pupils' choices. In Year 9 a wide range of subjects is offered, including the three separate sciences. The lack of curricular provision for ICT limits the assessment of pupils' competence in this area and inhibits progress in developing higher-order ICT skills. Most pupils take ten GCSE subjects and the most able mathematicians move onto an additional mathematics course in Year 11. Although changes to the option system since the previous inspection have resulted in better access to the sciences at GCSE, these are now all optional. The majority of Years 10 and 11 pupils choose not to take at least one of the sciences, thus restricting the range of future career opportunities available. The wide range of 23 subjects offered at A level is a particularly strong feature, the choices including politics, philosophy and ethics, both economics and business studies, psychology and two classical languages.
- 3.7 Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is thoughtfully planned in Years 9 to 11. It covers a wide range of important topics and is well supported by visits from outside speakers. Provision in the sixth form is more informal. Careers provision is thorough across the year groups, and sixth-form pupils benefit from a good range of initiatives designed to prepare them for life beyond school. The recent library development has raised its profile within the school and has provided improved on-line learning resources.
- 3.8 Very good provision is made to meet the needs of pupils of different ages and abilities, and this includes highly effective arrangements for those with SEND or EAL. Departmental support clinics are greatly valued by pupils. The comprehensive and well-planned extension programme of activities is highly effective in stimulating the learning experience of the most able and talented pupils.
- 3.9 The extra-curricular programme is excellent. The provision is eclectic, extensive and varied, and is complemented by a wealth of school trips and visits, giving all pupils opportunities to pursue their interests, develop initiative and self-reliance, and take responsibility. Links with the community through the community action programme give pupils a wide range of volunteering opportunities from visiting the elderly, to helping asylum seekers with literacy, and working in local primary schools. Curriculum enrichment is also achieved through field trips and performances outside school. Pupils' participation in all of these activities results in considerable benefit to their education and their social and personal development.

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

- 3.10 The overall quality of teaching throughout the school, including the sixth form, is good and a significant proportion is excellent. The quality of teaching makes an important and critical contribution to the good achievement shown by the pupils. Pupils' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire revealed their appreciation of the help that teachers give them, enabling them to feel that they are making good progress. The teaching helps to meet the school's aim to blend good academic performance with real achievement in pupils' individually-discovered talents. It does not fully meet the aim to encourage independent thinking in the classroom.
- 3.11 The best lessons are well planned and characterised by the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the aptitudes and needs of their pupils. This enables learning tasks to be particularly well chosen and adapted to provide appropriate challenge for the full range of pupils in the class, helping them to make good progress. The teaching and lesson content are usually interesting and highly stimulating, ensuring that pupils very much enjoy their learning. The excellent rapport and sensitive and supportive relationships between teachers and pupils enable the teaching to stimulate honest and open questions and effective discussion.
- 3.12 Teachers have high expectations of pupils of all ages and abilities, and enable pupils to acquire a secure foundation of basic skills and knowledge, as well as increasing and developing their understanding. Pupils are thus well prepared for public examinations, but also encouraged to enjoy learning for its own sake. The best teaching moves at a brisk pace and uses a stimulating and interesting range of well-chosen tasks and activities, developing skills such as interpretation, evaluation and analysis, and incorporating activities such as debate, problem-solving, and group work. The teaching stimulates interest and enjoyment when variety is used skilfully in the planning of tasks, and uses examples from pupils' own life experiences to illustrate points, such as world events, current affairs and popular culture. While research tasks in the library or on the internet are sometimes used, opportunities for independent learning are sometimes missed. Many lessons offer the most able pupils opportunities to tackle more demanding work or to move at a faster pace, as well as providing support for those with particular needs, such as those with SEND or EAL.
- 3.13 Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and use this very well to ask probing questions and explain ideas in an interesting or unusual way. In a small number of less successful lessons, the pace and sequence of planned tasks did not fully engage the interest and full attention of pupils and, as a result, their progress slowed.
- 3.14 Although the regular assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding is achieved well in the classroom through tests and effective questioning of individuals, the quality of marking of their work is often variable and inconsistent, both within and across subjects. The best is highly encouraging and supportive, and identifies clear targets for improvement through good evaluative comments and annotation. In some cases, however, marking is insufficiently accurate, frequent or helpful, and pupils are not always clear as to what they have to do to improve their work further.

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

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

- 4.1 The personal development of the pupils is excellent and is an outstanding strength of the school, entirely in accord with its aims. Pupils hold strong views and are principled young people whose ideas are reflected in the mature way in which they conduct themselves. They show a deep pride in and affection for the school community in which each person is cherished and valued. They are confident without being over-bearing.
- 4.2 The pupils' spiritual awareness is highly developed within the context of a strongly religious school whose ethos is universally respected by pupils and staff alike. The chaplain and her team provide a rich seam of activities ranging from chapel services to bible study groups and seminars exploring Christian leadership which offer ample scope for spiritual reflection. In chapel services, the excellence of the singing and music does much to inspire a sense of awe and wonder. Assemblies, in which pupils frequently take part, provide excellent opportunities for quiet and thoughtful reflection on many personal and world-wide issues, to which pupils respond well.
- 4.3 Pupils have a very strong moral sense and understand the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. They think carefully about what is right and what is wrong and make up their own minds about moral themes which are covered in PSHE lessons, in the general curriculum, and supplemented by excellent outside speakers. Pupils explore sensitive and controversial issues. They are encouraged to be courageous in speaking their mind and to be faithful to their beliefs, but do so with due regard for the feelings of others, even if on rare occasions, mistakes are made. This fosters the development of personal integrity.
- 4.4 The pupils' social development is excellent. Prefects are good leaders and role models and contribute much to the calmly disciplined routine of school life. Lower down the school, there are some opportunities for younger pupils to take responsibility within the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) or the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme; but the pupils' pre-inspection questionnaire reveals that further opportunities to take on responsibility would be welcomed. Pupils find the strong sense of community within school supportive and reassuring. It is natural for all members of the school to look out for and take care of each other. Pupils particularly appreciate and benefit from the wide range of house competitions and events, many of which are organised by the pupils themselves, especially in the sixth form.
- 4.5 The pupils' cultural awareness is strong and they enjoy the ethnic diversity represented within the school population. In houses, special themed events celebrate other traditions, and the religious studies syllabus ensures that pupils understand the core values and beliefs of other world religions. The partnership with a school in Uganda, which the pupils support through fundraising initiatives and a biennial visit, enhances the pupils' cultural awareness of the lives of young people living in deprived conditions. Closer to home, the pupils benefit greatly from the school's high quality art, music and drama, and involvement in the local literary festival. A recent visit to a high security prison prompted discussions about how our own society and cultural opinion deal with crime in Britain today.

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

- 4.6 Arrangements to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils are good, with many strengths. The quality of the school's pastoral care is excellent, and fully supports the school's aim to value each individual within a family setting.
- 4.7 The strong tutorial system, house-based in the first three years, provides a caring and supportive framework, which is flexibly adapted to the needs of individual pupils, who feel self-confident and well supported. Pupils choose their own tutors in the sixth form, thus preserving existing contacts and relationships. The important house structure underpins the pastoral support networks, and house staff and tutors deal sensitively and effectively with pastoral issues, as well as monitoring pupils' academic progress. Parents and pupils alike feel that the system works very well. Meetings between tutors and house staff are regular and enable early identification and discussion of potential problems. The school has a good system in place involving tutors, housemasters and the senior tutor and senior pastoral staff to help pupils manage stress. Regular internal reports facilitate good communication between staff. In many areas of school, a strong culture of older pupils mentoring those younger is evident.
- 4.8 Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent. A relaxed but self-disciplined atmosphere prevails both in and out of lessons, and supports a stimulating environment for learning. Pupils know who to turn to in the event of a difficulty. Relationships between pupils are largely founded on mutual respect, maturity and tolerance.
- 4.9 Procedures to promote good behaviour are very effective. The anti-bullying policy, implemented well through PSHE lessons and training for staff, ensures that bullying is not a concern for pupils and they are aware of multiple channels to resolve relationship problems, should they ever be needed. The 'gold chit' system is well used to reward and encourage good progress and service. Sanctions are lightly and sensibly applied. Pupils understand the code of conduct and behavioural expectations are clear. Staff generally handle minor misdemeanours in a sensitive and thoughtful manner.
- 4.10 The school's child protection policies and safeguarding arrangements are good and are implemented effectively, with due regard to the latest statutory guidance. The school has carried out appropriate child protection training for all teaching and non-teaching staff. The school manages risk very effectively in nearly every respect through staff awareness and vigilance and the work of the health and safety committee. Risk assessments are routinely carried out, although the culture of risk awareness is not always strongly evident in every department. Day pupils arriving early are well supervised by duty staff. Good measures to ensure safety from fire are well documented and implemented. An appropriate policy to achieve improved access for pupils with disabilities is in place. The medical centre is well organised, well staffed, well equipped and welcoming. Pupils regard the food, at breakfast and lunch in particular, as excellent, and healthy choices are available for all meals. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for physical activity and exercise, both within and outside the timetable, helping to promote a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Both the admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and correctly stored.

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

- 4.11 The boarders at Dean Close enjoy an excellent boarding experience that encompasses a happy, cohesive, and well-integrated community with a strong sense of family and unity lying at the heart of the school. The boarders' academic progress and personal development are well supported by their boarding life and this reflects the aims and ethos of the school in ensuring that all pupils matter, that all are valued and feel at ease with themselves and each other in their house environment. The school has fully addressed the recommendations of the last Ofsted boarding welfare inspection, in particular making the necessary improvements for boarders to be cared for when they are unwell.
- 4.12 The quality of boarding accommodation is at least good and in some cases excellent, and this strongly enhances the boarders' quality of life and sense of well-being. They appreciate the comfortable rooms and working spaces which are of appropriate size and well furnished, and provide easy access to the school's computer network. Common rooms are good, and kitchen areas give boarders the opportunity to prepare their own snacks. The boarders have high praise for the quality and range of food offered, in particular the Sunday brunch.
- 4.13 Relationships are excellent within the boarding community not only with their peers within each house but also across the age range and between different boarding and day houses. Boarders from overseas are successfully integrated into the boarding community and into the life of the school, and the international induction weekend is particularly beneficial.
- 4.14 The housemasters and housemistresses work very hard to develop the distinctive character and identity of the different boarding houses, which appreciate some autonomy in developing their own procedures and practices, although inconsistency in application of these across the different boarding houses can occasionally occur. Boarders have high praise for the level of support, care and guidance they receive from all levels of boarding staff including, for those in Years 9 to 11, their house-based tutors.
- 4.15 Boarders enjoy a good range of activities and have access to many school facilities in the evenings and at weekends. Sunday trips are occasionally organised, but the boarders also appreciate the recognition by the house staff that, in a busy school life, there is time for relaxation and catching up with work also.

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

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

- 5.1 The governance of the school is good, and provides a strong impetus and sense of purpose to guide the school's future development and direction. Both the trustees and council members ensure that the school is faithful to its mission and central purpose.
- 5.2 Effective structures for governance ensure that appropriate oversight is achieved and expertise and advice given through the committee structure, and the regular visits trustees make to different areas of the school, including visits to subject departments. The elected council members hold the trustees to account through thorough systems of annual reporting and approval of the accounts. Trustees work with senior staff in identifying clear and ambitious priorities and plans to underpin the school's future development. They exert good financial control and ensure that human and physical resources are efficiently deployed to sustain high academic standards, improve facilities, and achieve a diverse and rewarding educational experience for pupils. Trustees regularly review their register of significant operational risks. They receive good induction training on appointment, and regular updates on important matters.
- 5.3 The trustees, as proprietors, take their statutory responsibilities very seriously, and monitor health and safety matters, safeguarding and child protection closely, as a high priority. Trustees have been allocated to both these areas, and provide regular reports on the effectiveness with which the school is maintaining good practice on their behalf. School policies are regularly reviewed and approved by the board. However, systematic routine arrangements for monitoring the full range of educational and pastoral regulations are not well developed, and there is little awareness of the new statutory minimum standards for boarding.

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

- 5.4 The good leadership and management throughout the school are highly effective in achieving high academic and pastoral outcomes for pupils, and many aspects are excellent. The school's strong sense of purpose, and its clear and consistent Christian values and principles, are a highly significant factor in its success, and enable the school's aims to be successfully met. This is clearly evident in the pupils' achievement and progress and their outstanding personal development.
- 5.5 The headmaster and his senior team provide clear-sighted and dynamic leadership that enables the school's vision to be communicated and supported by staff, parents and pupils, and its forward momentum sustained. There is a clear sense that all who work at Dean Close feel part of a corporate enterprise, with the well-being and needs of the individual pupil at its heart. This is a school that clearly knows where it is going and what it wants to achieve. The chaplain provides strong leadership of the spiritual life of the school.
- 5.6 Academic leadership and management are sharply focused, and heads of department undertake a formal self-evaluation of the success of their subject areas each year, producing an action plan and targets for future development and improvement. Pastoral areas of the school and the work of the houses are not formally evaluated in a similar way, but effectiveness is nevertheless assessed

through discussion, good channels of communication and regular meetings. Pastoral leadership roles are distributed among a number of senior staff who have shared and sometimes overlapping responsibilities. Houses are encouraged to develop appropriate autonomy and a characteristic style, but occasional inconsistencies in approach and expectation can sometimes occur. A culture of reflection and awareness of strengths and weaknesses is becoming more strongly evident within the school. However, significant variability in teachers' marking has not been clearly identified and addressed. The school's comprehensive strategic plan embraces priorities for all three schools, and links academic, pastoral and operational aspirations with clear values and aims.

- 5.7 The committed and hard-working staff are well deployed and most combine the important tutoring role with their academic responsibilities. Staff training, both on appointment and during service, is well planned and includes important child protection and appropriate health and safety elements. The biennial appraisal system includes lesson observations and an optional pupils' satisfaction survey, and enables the identification of clear targets for better professional recognition and development. All necessary staff recruitment checks, including those through the Criminal Records Bureau, are efficiently carried out and accurately recorded.

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

- 5.8 The school fulfils its aims well in maintaining good relationships with its parents. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents revealed great satisfaction with the school's care and educational provision for pupils. A recent survey conducted by the school highlighted a few areas of parental concern about transition arrangements between the preparatory school and the senior school which the school is seeking to address, and further parental consultations are planned as the school develops new initiatives, such as changes to the curriculum.
- 5.9 Those parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed exceptionally strong support for the school. They particularly approved of the subjects and educational experiences offered, the quality of pastoral care and support, the worthwhile attitudes and values promoted, and the ready availability of school policies and other information.
- 5.10 Parents are welcomed into the school and encouraged to support their children's efforts and contributions, for example, in sport, music and drama, and there are now opportunities for them to participate in a number of sporting initiatives themselves. Plans are in hand to extend this to other areas of school life such as music and social events. The school is aware that boarding parents may find such contact logistically difficult, and the extension of the school's website and intranet aims to enable parents to keep even more in touch with what is going on in school throughout the year. Housemasters and housemistresses establish an excellent rapport with parents, but the increased individual tutoring in the sixth form can occasionally result in unclear lines of contact with parents.
- 5.11 All the statutory items of information required to be available to parents and those of prospective pupils are easily accessible. Parents receive many different sources of information about the school's life and work from the website and other electronic alerts to a range of printed newsletters and letters, and the excellent parents' handbook, which provides clear advice and information, particularly for new parents.

Reports and grade cards are regularly sent to parents, and these are generally detailed and helpful, painting a clear picture of their children's progress.

5.12 The school's complaints procedure contains all the required elements. Any complaints or concerns are dealt with sensitively and effectively.

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



## 6. INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chairman of trustees and two other trustees, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies and a Chapel service. Inspectors visited boarding and day houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

Mr Timothy Holgate

Mr Michael Evans

Mrs Sarah Haslam

Mrs Gwen Randall

Mr Mark Twells

Reporting Inspector

Senior Master, HMC school

Deputy Head, GSA school

Former Head, HMC school

Head of Department, HMC school