



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**DENSTONE COLLEGE**

**STANDARD INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Denstone College

Full Name of School	<b>Denstone College</b>		
DfE Number	<b>860/6003</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>1102588</b>		
Address	<b>Denstone College Denstone Uttoxeter Staffordshire ST14 5HN</b>		
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Email Address	<b>hmoffice@denstonecollege.org</b>		
Head	<b>Mr David Derbyshire</b>		
Chair of Governors	<b>Mrs Pippa Gee</b>		
Age Range	<b>11 to 18</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>591</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (366 boys; 225 girls)</b>		
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	<b>447</b>	Capacity for flexi-boarding: <b>10</b>
Number of Boarders	Total:	<b>144</b>	
	Full:	<b>100</b>	Weekly: <b>44</b>
Inspection dates	<b>11 Oct 2011 to 12 Oct 2011</b>		
	<b>09 Nov 2011 to 11 Nov 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 September 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 any 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 June 2011 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 Denstone College, founded in 1868 by Nathaniel Woodard, is a day and boarding school situated on the Staffordshire/Derbyshire border. The school is a member of the Woodard Group, a federation of 45 Church of England schools. The school is a charitable trust administered by a board of governors. It seeks to develop achievement, confidence and happiness in its pupils, encouraging them to aim high and so reach their full potential. The school is co-educational, with 591 pupils aged 11 to 18. A total of 180 pupils are in the sixth form, and 144 pupils are boarders.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection in 2005, the school has made significant improvements and development of buildings and facilities. New buildings include a music school, information and communication technology (ICT) classrooms and a medical centre. All boarding areas and day living accommodation have been refurbished and girls' boarding has been extended. A new chemistry laboratory has been added. Sports facilities have been extended by the addition of two new synthetic turf pitches, new games pitches and new netball courts. Work is currently underway on a new classroom block and sports pavilion with extra changing rooms.
- 1.3 The ability of pupils is assessed using national standardised tests. The ability profile is above the national average up to GCSE, and in line with the national average in the sixth form. Most pupils come from families with professional or business backgrounds who live in the local area. Of the 78 pupils who have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), 29 receive specialist learning support. Four pupils have statements of special educational needs. The vast majority of pupils are of white British origin and a few are from overseas, 23 of whom receive support for English as an additional language (EAL).
- 1.4 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 Denstone College is highly successful in meeting its aims to develop achievement, confidence and happiness in its pupils. Results in public examinations have significantly improved, and pupils' strong achievement in activities beyond the classroom is palpable. The pupils' sporting success is a particular strength of the school, while those whose interests lie in more aesthetic pursuits also achieve at a high level. The high academic achievement arises from excellent teaching. Improvement in teaching, linked to a more targeted system for helping pupils to understand their progress, has been a focus since the previous inspection, and this has raised academic standards. The curriculum is good and the extra-curricular programme is outstanding. Although good progress has been made since the previous inspection towards the recommendations made at that time, the library's contribution to the quality of pupils' learning and the provision to challenge the academically gifted pupils are not yet fully developed. However, these are included in the school's development plan.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is excellent. Pupils are a delight to meet, are courteous and engaging in conversation. They are grounded individuals who combine honesty and directness with a keen sense of compassion, reflected in their support for charities at home and overseas. Relationships amongst pupils are strong, and they respect and celebrate each other's individual strengths and interests. In their excellent support and care of pupils, staff go out of their way to encourage and praise pupils' efforts and success. Pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire were very positive about their academic progress and teachers' support of them. They confirmed that any bullying is swiftly tackled. Almost all said that they like being at the school. They did express some concerns about opportunities for taking responsibility, fairness of sanctions, monitoring of workloads and the school's response to pupils' views. Neither pupils' comments in interviews nor inspectors' findings supported these concerns.
- 2.3 Governance, leadership and management are excellent. The progress made by the school since the previous inspection has stemmed from the unified vision and practical action of all in management roles. Improvements in academic standards and care of pupils have been supported by significant investment in high quality facilities and accommodation. Of equal note has been the investment in high quality staff. Staff are outstandingly led by senior managers who are proactive, highly industrious and much involved in the daily life of the school. Regulatory requirements, including the safeguarding of pupils, are rigorously monitored. The school has an excellent relationship with its parents, reflected in the strong responses to the parents' pre-inspection questionnaire. Parents are very pleased with all aspects of the school, including academic progress, pastoral care, communication and management. Parents commented that pupils truly enjoy their school life and are always encouraged in all they undertake.

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

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

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

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

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Provide more challenge to the academically gifted pupils in lessons and in extra-curricular activities.
  2. Support pupils' learning by making the library a centre for academic enquiry, research and reading.

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

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

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' achievement and of their learning, attitudes and skills is good, with elements that are excellent. Pupils are well educated, in line with the school's aim to develop their achievement and so reach their full potential. However, academically gifted pupils are not challenged in all subjects.
- 3.2 Pupils display good subject knowledge and understanding. In many lessons their subject knowledge is very secure, as in a Year 8 history lesson on Elizabeth I. Pupils have good literacy and numeracy skills, which they apply effectively. Pupils' ICT skills are strong and are used adroitly across the curriculum. Creativity is equally well developed, observed notably in pupils' compositions of minimalist scores in Year 9 music. Pupils are articulate and have well-developed listening skills. They think critically and are adept at problem solving. Pupils have good note-taking skills, read well and are eager to contribute orally. Their physical dexterity is well developed, evident in the high quality of their art, their products in design and technology and their sporting skills.
- 3.3 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. In GCSE and A-level examinations, results have been excellent when compared with the national average for maintained schools. At GCSE, well over half of the grades were A\* or A, and at A level, two-thirds of the grades were A\*, A or B. The 2011 A-level results were significantly higher. This level of attainment indicates that pupils make exceptional progress up to GCSE, and good progress to A level relative to the average for pupils of similar ability, as supported by nationally standardised measures of progress.
- 3.4 Pupils identified with SEND do not achieve at such a high level as their peers in public examinations, but the school's data confirms that they achieve in line with their abilities. Based on evaluations of their standard both before and after entry to the school, pupils with EAL achieve in line with their peers. The most able pupils gain high grades in public examinations.
- 3.5 The pupils' achievement in extra-curricular activities is excellent. They have represented Great Britain in a number of sports including hockey, rounders, golf and windsurfing, and, in rugby and cricket, pupils have gained professional contracts with clubs and counties. The show-jumping team has enjoyed national success. Pupils with musical talent have been selected for national choirs and orchestras. Many pupils gain good levels of success in the UK Maths Challenge, and in the Arkwright Scholarship for engineering.
- 3.6 Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and they clearly enjoy their studies, gaining great satisfaction from their success. They are well behaved in lessons, settle immediately to tasks and work well co-operatively. Equally, many value the opportunities they are given to work independently, particularly in research using ICT. Pupils are able to sustain their concentration and the most able relish the additional challenges provided, when these are available to them. Their relationships with teachers are excellent, and they speak with gratitude of teachers' support of them in the development of their academic and practical skills.



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

- 3.7 The pupils' success is supported by the good quality of the curriculum and the excellent extra-curricular programme, which ensure that the school's aims to allow them to achieve and to develop confidence are met.
- 3.8 The academic curriculum is well balanced and broad, and is suitable for the abilities and needs of all pupils. Pupils study a good range of subjects in Years 7 to 9, and at GCSE and A level, they are usually able to study their choice of options. At A level, the school offers a good range of subjects, including a number of new subjects such as politics and psychology. Selected pupils are able to take GCSEs early. Setting pupils according to their ability supports their academic needs well, as does the homework programme. The pupils benefit from the excellent provision for aesthetic and physical subjects. Curriculum enrichment such as field trips in history, geography and politics enables pupils to understand the context of topics they are studying. Such opportunities in other subjects are limited.
- 3.9 The needs of pupils with SEND or EAL are very well met. Guidance and information given to subject teachers about these pupils ensure that they are well supported in mainstream classes. Pupils of higher academic ability are well catered for in some curriculum areas, with the more effective schemes of work giving clear indications of how they are to be challenged. This is not consistent in all subjects. The Extended Project Qualification, offered in Years 12 and 13, gives pupils excellent opportunities to develop their skills of independent learning and provides them with significant academic challenge.
- 3.10 Up to Year 11, pupils benefit from a well-developed personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme; for the sixth form, the programme is still being improved. The careers guidance programme is comprehensive. It is rated highly by the pupils and they value the support given to them for their university applications. Investment in ICT hardware and the wireless network has significantly enhanced pupils' effective use of ICT. Library resources have improved since the previous inspection. Pupils use the library as a space to complete homework, but its use for independent research, to support the curriculum, is limited.
- 3.11 Pupils also benefit from a very busy and wide-ranging extra-curricular programme. This programme of enrichment affords them the opportunity to develop a range of skills whether in music, sport, drama, art, climbing, film making or Spanish cooking. Particular care is taken to ensure that the programme is well managed so that pupils are not overloaded. Visiting speakers and debates challenge pupils intellectually, although this programme of academic enrichment is not yet fully developed. Pupils enjoy a variety of tours abroad. Their understanding of the needs of those less fortunate than themselves is strengthened by their financial and practical support of three projects in South Africa. Pupils gain insight into business through enterprise evenings and the demands of performance in the musical outreach programme. Working with many international and local organisations, such as in a hospital in support of patients with cancer, gives pupils understanding of challenges facing individuals and families.

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

- 3.12 The quality of teaching is excellent overall, meeting the school's aim to promote the pupils' achievement. Teaching was judged to be excellent in half of the lessons observed. These were characterised by good planning, a fast pace, with dynamic delivery, a variety of tasks that challenged pupils to think, evaluate and draw conclusions, and full pupil engagement, with opportunities for independent study.
- 3.13 Teachers display excellent subject knowledge, illustrated by the high quality of their questioning of pupils and their answers to pupils' questions. Teachers have a very good knowledge of individual pupils and their needs. Pupils with SEND or EAL receive individual help in lessons to make appropriate progress. Pupils and their parents appreciate the time and trouble many teachers readily take to provide individual support, help and encouragement both in and after class. However, academically gifted pupils are not always challenged by teachers. In the best lessons, opportunities for group or paired work involving original research and initiative challenges are used to promote learning and intellectual curiosity. The impact of this high quality of teaching was observed in Year 7 presentations about machines supplying energy to scientists undertaking research in the field. The best examples of marking of pupils' work are thorough and detailed, and include guidance for improvement. In a minority of teaching, the standard of marking is more limited.
- 3.14 The planning and organisation of teaching are effective; revision exercises are often used to refresh memories, build knowledge and promote engagement at the start of classes. The teaching observed employed a variety of styles, including the excellent use of ICT to promote learning, and thus improved the achievement of all in the class. Teachers ask open-ended questions, have high expectations and encourage learning for its own sake, promoting challenge and independence in pupils' learning. Homework is appropriately set, but teachers do not always ensure that instructions for exact tasks are recorded accurately in pupils' planners.
- 3.15 The focus of teaching encourages pupils' good behaviour as well as their active engagement in learning. This was particularly evident in Year 10 art where pupils were challenged to analyse artists' styles. The friendly, calm and purposeful atmosphere of classrooms, coupled with the use of humour to further good relationships, promote achievement. Many classrooms and departments feature bright and interesting displays of current pupils' work and posters relevant to the subject; these displays do much to enhance the learning environment.
- 3.16 Excellent progress has been made in response to the recommendation from the previous inspection regarding teaching. Heads of department have readily adopted the aims of the school's development plan to improve pupils' achievement further, through sharing best practice in terms of professional review, lesson planning and target setting. Strategies to improve pupils' learning include monitoring the consistency and frequency of marking and assessment of work, and the writing of improved schemes of work. These initiatives have led to the rise in pupils' attainment, but they are not, as yet, fully implemented across all departments.

## **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 pupils' personal development is excellent. The school is successful in its aim of developing happy, confident young adults who are keen to achieve and to develop as responsible and caring members of the community.
- 4.2 Pupils' spiritual awareness is excellent. Pupils benefit from many opportunities for spiritual growth and the development of self-confidence, self-knowledge and self-esteem. The chapel, at the centre of school life, is a place that pupils use for prayer, reflection and contemplation. Pupils readily contribute to services and addresses, often taking the lead in chapel presentations. Pupils approach the school Eucharist services with reverence and sincerity; many have been or are preparing to be confirmed in the Christian faith. Pupils report that they enjoy being part of the school's musical traditions, particularly choral music, and adding this spiritual dimension to services. In drama, for example in the *Simply Amazing* production, pupils develop confidence and self-awareness. In religious studies (RS) pupils explore other faiths, comparing their own and others' values and beliefs. Pupils value and respect one another's differences.
- 4.3 Pupils' moral awareness is also very strong. They develop a deep awareness of right and wrong, as well as a sense of responsibility towards others. This is promoted by work in the curriculum, particularly in PSHE and RS, and through the strong pastoral system. School rules are perceived to be fair; standards of behaviour in class, in boarding houses and in the school in general are good, and are reinforced through appropriate rewards and sanctions. Pupils follow their teachers' lead in showing courtesy and consideration for others. They are also aware of responsibilities in the wider context, exemplified by senior pupils' involvement in World Challenge expeditions in Vietnam and Madagascar.
- 4.4 Social development is excellent. Pupils engage readily and with enthusiasm. New pupils settle quickly, supported by the highly effective 'buddy' system. The broad range of activities helps pupils learn to communicate effectively. Many opportunities for pupils of all ages to take on leadership roles and responsibilities exist, such as school council membership or team captaincy, and almost all in Year 13 are appointed as prefects each year. House social activities and competitions promote awareness of others. Pupils take pleasure in the varied achievements of others, and respect the most able performers in major sports as well as those who have achieved at the highest level in aesthetic challenges. Pupils' awareness of the needs of those who are less fortunate is reflected in their chapel charity presentations.
- 4.5 Pupils' cultural awareness is excellent. Pupils from different cultural backgrounds relate very well with each other and mix easily in school. Their respect is evident in the successful and popular international evening and the friendships that develop in the boarding houses. Pupils' enthusiastic involvement in music, art and drama shapes their cultural understanding. The curriculum presents opportunities to explore cultural issues and ethnic diversity. Overseas expeditions and the completion of the 1,800 mile Ultra-Marathon charity event for a Kenyan school demonstrate pupils' awareness of cultural diversity at first hand. A number of pupils readily volunteer for Gap Year placements in developing countries.

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

- 4.6 Pastoral care and the arrangements for welfare, health and safety are excellent, and support the strong personal development of pupils, including boarders. The pastoral care enjoyed by pupils clearly meets the school's aim to allow and encourage individuals to thrive.
- 4.7 The pastoral system of supporting pupils through overlapping year and house groupings is very effective. Strong leadership by heads of houses, heads of school sections and tutors, together with good teamwork and thorough systems, ensures that pupils' academic and social development is carefully monitored and recorded. Evidence of this commitment is that almost all on the senior management team are tutors. The high quality of relationships between staff and pupils, and amongst pupils, underpins pupils' care and is a great strength of the school. The school's response to pupils' views is positive, even if not all requests are granted.
- 4.8 Through house events, competitions and school activities, pupils develop a strong sense of identity and loyalty. Pupils of all ages report that, as well as the formal system of support, they have a wide range of adults with whom they can discuss any issue. The school rules are clearly stated and pupils understand behavioural boundaries. Anti-bullying procedures are reinforced in PSHE sessions. A 'telling culture' is being established. The school's strong commitment to the care of its pupils includes working closely with parents; guidance on a range of pastoral issues is available to them. In response to the questionnaire, pupils were appreciative of the academic progress they make and the support given by teachers in and out of the classroom. They praised the extra-curricular programme and stated that any bullying is swiftly dealt with. Almost all respondents said that they enjoy being at the school. Pupils raised some concerns about opportunities for taking responsibility, the fairness of sanctions, the monitoring of workloads and the school's response to pupils' views. These concerns were not supported by pupils' comments in interviews or by inspection findings.
- 4.9 The school's culture of safeguarding is robust. Staff and senior pupils are well aware of the child protection policy and the procedures to follow in any cases of disclosure. Child protection training for designated people and for all staff is up-to-date. The designated people have good links with the local safeguarding board. Health and safety arrangements, including fire safety, are comprehensive and fully documented. The access plan for those with SEND is up-to-date. Pupils benefit from the good quality of food, with choice available to assist with the development of healthy lifestyles, in addition to excellent facilities for sport. The well-managed medical centre strongly supports pupils' medical needs and their pastoral care; its staff also contribute to the PSHE programme. Admission and attendance registers are correctly maintained and stored.

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

- 4.10 Boarders enjoy an excellent boarding experience. Boarders' academic outcomes and personal development are well supported by their boarding life, and the school therefore meets its boarding aim to develop the whole person. Boarders feel excited about belonging to the Denstone community. They feel relaxed, secure and safe within it, and feel well cared for by highly supportive staff. Boarders benefit in terms of making firm friendships and becoming more confident in social situations. This enables them to make a strong contribution to school life.
- 4.11 Boarders clearly enjoy excellent relationships with each other. A number are from overseas and comment that they are welcomed into the boarding community from the first day. This is supported by the excellent level of pastoral care in the houses. Attention is given to the needs of the individual, whilst a sense of house and communal spirit is carefully fostered. Relationships between the staff and the boarders are excellent, and loyalty to the house and to the school is keenly felt. The boarders are courteous, mature and interested, and confident without being complacent. They are respectfully at ease with the boarding staff, as observed in the house meetings prior to homework sessions.
- 4.12 Boarders confirm that there are plenty of outings and activities after classes and at the weekend. The school's facilities are well used by boarders at these times. The senior club is a facility much appreciated by those in the sixth form, who take responsibilities to cook meals and arrange entertainment with the support of house tutors. Outings take place to such destinations as include Alton Towers, Tamworth Snowdome, the theatre and local cinemas. Sundays can remain as rest days in order to allow boarders to unwind and recharge. Pupils have opportunities to suggest changes or raise issues at the boarders' council or house meetings.
- 4.13 Accommodation and resources are good. While improvements have been made to washing facilities and bedrooms, the decoration in some areas is tired. The school recognises this as an area for development. The pupils benefit from the excellent audio-visual equipment and a variety of indoor sports tables. The daily supply of fresh fruit and basic provisions to stock the house kitchens adds to the family feel of the houses, and allows boarders to return to make snacks during breaks and in the evenings. The Ofsted boarding welfare inspection in June made no recommendations. Management and systems for boarding care are well developed.

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

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

- 5.1 The governing body's support of the development of the school is excellent, enabling the school to meet its aims. Since the previous inspection, pupils' academic attainment has increased significantly, as has investment in staff, buildings and resources for learning. These developments are testament to the governing body's caring guidance and support of the senior management's vision for the school. Governors and senior management work closely in the best interests of the pupils, and governors also exercise their monitoring role well, ensuring that they understand the detail of the daily life of the school and the purpose of any proposed developments. To this end, governors have become more involved in school activities, attending sessions of staff training, visiting departments, and meeting staff and pupils socially. In response to the questionnaire, parents showed very strong support for governance.
- 5.2 The governing body has adopted a number of new strategies to enable governors to carry out their role more effectively. Governor induction and training have been strengthened, the remit of the education committee now includes boarding and pastoral care, and a governor is responsible for oversight of the education of younger pupils and the aspirations of parents for their children's education. A day-long meeting is held every year away from the school so that governors and senior staff can consider the school's development. New committees for personnel and ICT have been established. The composition of the governing body is regularly reviewed, identifying skills needed to strengthen governors' expertise. Governors' committees receive written and verbal reports from staff. Long-standing members of staff confirm that the governors are now well known by staff, and fully involved in the school community.
- 5.3 The governors are diligent in discharging their responsibilities. Financial control and development planning are well monitored. School policies are reviewed by committees. Pupils' welfare is carefully monitored. Health and safety issues and pupils' safeguarding are allocated to specific governors. The full governing body conducts the annual review of the policies and procedures for child protection. Scrutiny by the governing body of the appointment procedures for all staff, governors and volunteers is good. Senior managers value the level of support they receive from the governors and their support for the life of the school.

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

- 5.4 Leadership and management are excellent, fully supporting the school's aims. High attainment in public examinations, the quality of pupils' personal development and the school's inclusivity are guided by a senior management team that knows its individual strengths and works collegiately in the best interests of the pupils.
- 5.5 Inclusivity is a hallmark of the school and is exemplified in the roles of the senior management team. Responsibilities are widely shared and the leadership gives members of the team scope to use initiative in their management roles. In addition, most senior managers have more than one role, for example in serving as tutors. Pupils confirm that senior managers are committed to the aim to involve them in as much activity as possible. As parents commented in the questionnaire responses, the 'can do' example set by senior staff is engendered in pupils.

- 5.6 Management of academic departments is strong. Senior management has put strategies in place to strengthen the role and effectiveness of heads of department. Heads of department contribute to curriculum development and have been integral to the improvement of teaching. In response to the recommendation of the previous inspection, the school has implemented teaching policies, improved performance management, enhanced the professional development programme and increased the monitoring of classroom practice. All these strategies have raised academic attainment. Middle managers also report that senior managers support them well. This is reflected in the way all senior managers are seen about the school, actively engaging with staff and pupils. The recommendations of the previous inspection to challenge the more able pupils and to improve the library have not yet been fully addressed.
- 5.7 The overlapping systems of pastoral and academic care are highly effective. This is confirmed by questionnaire responses and pupils' discussions with inspectors. This quality of care starts with the strong relationships between pupils and staff, but is underpinned by rigorous recording. Guidance from the pastoral committee supports heads of houses and tutors. Senior leaders ensure that all policies and procedures, particularly those for health and safety, are effectively implemented and regularly monitored. The safeguarding of pupils is given a high priority. Staff recruitment is managed efficiently, and the procedures for checking all staff, governors and volunteers are thorough; the single central register is well documented. New entrants to the teaching profession, as well as all staff new to the school, are well supported by departmental and senior staff mentors. Development planning, at both school and department level, is strong.

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

- 5.8 Links with parents are excellent and have improved since the previous inspection. The aim that parents should be fully involved in the life of the school and partners in the development of their children's potential is well met.
- 5.9 The overwhelming majority of parents are very satisfied with the school's provision for their children, as seen by the extremely positive responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The school is also proactive in this area, carrying out its own surveys at parents' evenings. Areas rated particularly highly by parents included the range of subjects and extra-curricular activities, the care and support given to their children and the ease of communication with the school. Parents were also very satisfied with the school's promotion of worthwhile attitudes and views. No significant areas of concern were noted in parental responses. Parents commented that the school provides their children with a very rounded education, encourages them to have high aspirations and helps them to understand responsibilities of community life as well as aiming for personal success. It is significant that a good number of parents have more than one child at the school, and they confirmed that individuality of education for each child in the family is a feature of the school.
- 5.10 The information about the school, made available to parents of current and prospective pupils, is comprehensive. Publications including the termly newsletter *The Word*, the annual magazine *The Denstonian* and the prospectus are informative and celebratory, with a clear focus on pupils' achievements. The school website is valued by parents as being useful and accessible. They appreciate the new parent portal as they can now access up-to-date assessment and attendance information about their children.

- 5.11 Parents praised the school's use of email for communication, which ensures that responses have been prompt and concerns addressed. The great majority of parents reported that they are encouraged to be involved in the life of the school. Parents' evenings are now more frequent than at the time of the previous inspection and are very well attended. Parents also attend guidance sessions arranged by the school on matters such as e-safety. The Friends of Denstone College group organises three major and well-supported events each year at the school, and parents value the many opportunities to attend sports fixtures, chapel services and a wide variety of musical and drama performances. Parents join with former pupils in delivering presentations and consultations about a range of careers as part of the school's careers programme.
- 5.12 The system for regular half-termly grades and reports, introduced since the previous inspection, has been very well received by parents, and the information is clear, detailed and easily available. The published complaints procedure is appropriate and it is rarely used. The vast majority of parents reported satisfaction with the manner in which the school has handled their concerns.

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



## INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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

### Inspectors

Mr Adrian Underwood	Reporting Inspector
Mr David Ewart	Former Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Andrew Johnson	Senior Master, HMC school
Mrs Sue Lucas	Senior Teacher, SHMIS school
Mr Simon Northcote-Green	Deputy Headmaster, HMC school
Ms Sally Peacock	Deputy Head, GSA school