



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**PRIOR PARK COLLEGE**

**STANDARD INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Prior Park College

The preparatory school was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of College	<b>Prior Park College</b>		
DfE Number	<b>800/6001</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>281242</b>		
Address	<b>Prior Park College Ralph Allen Drive Combe Down Bath Somerset BA2 5AH</b>		
Telephone Number	<b>01225 831013</b>		
Fax Number	<b>01225 835753</b>		
Email Address	<b>info@priorpark.co.uk</b>		
Headmaster	<b>Mr James Murphy-O'Connor</b>		
Chair of Governors	<b>Commodore Christopher York</b>		
Age Range	<b>11 to 19</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>590</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (313 boys; 277 girls)</b>		
Numbers by Age	11-19:	<b>590</b>	
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	<b>461</b>	Capacity for flexi-boarding: <b>4</b>
Number of Boarders	Total:	<b>129</b>	
	Full:	<b>86</b>	Weekly: <b>43</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 2007.

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 December 2009 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 The college educates boys and girls from the age of eleven to nineteen and offers boarding from the age of thirteen. The Catholic Christian dimension of the college is central to its ethos and provision.
- 1.2 The college aims to provide the highest quality Catholic Christian education: *Deo duce Deo luce* – With God our leader, with God our light. It seeks to promote as fully as possible every pupil's talents, academic potential and personal development, providing pastoral care that is encouraging, supportive and disciplined. It endeavours to build links with parents, the local community and the wider cultures of the world, and to enable leavers to become confident, capable, compassionate and independent-minded.
- 1.3 The college was founded in 1830; it is now owned and governed by the Prior Park Educational Trust, which also has responsibility for two other schools. It is situated to the south of Bath with buildings comprising a Georgian mansion and specialist teaching facilities that have been added over the years.
- 1.4 There are 590 pupils (313 boys and 277 girls), of whom 129 board, 43 of them on a weekly basis. The college admits pupils mainly at the age of eleven and again at thirteen. Some pupils leave at sixteen and others join for the sixth form, which currently has 185 students. Pupils are mostly from families with professional or business backgrounds. The majority of pupils are White British, others are from a wide range of backgrounds and some are from overseas.
- 1.5 The college welcomes pupils from Catholic and non-Catholic families who are likely to benefit from and contribute positively to its ethos. At present 60 pupils have support for their special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and 64 pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL), some of whom receive support for English. The ability of the pupils is above average overall. Standardised tests show that pupils in the college have a wide range of ability, with more pupils far above the national average than are below it.
- 1.6 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
Lower 3	Year 7
Form 3	Year 8
Form 4	Year 9
Lower 5	Year 10
Upper 5	Year 11
Lower sixth	Year 12
Upper sixth	Year 13

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

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

- 2.1 Prior Park College is outstandingly successful in achieving its aims. The college's ethos is rooted in the best traditions of Catholic education and redolent of aspiration for the highest standards in academic endeavour and in every area of young people's skills and talents. Academic outcomes are strong, with a very large proportion of A-level entries in 2011 leading to grade A or A\* results, while at GCSE results have been far above the national average for maintained schools. Progress is good in relation to pupils' starting points. This academic success is underpinned by teaching that is excellent overall, and by stalwart effort that the college has inculcated on the part of the pupils. In sporting activities, outdoor pursuits and in areas such as music and the arts, pupils strive tirelessly for excellence and reach very high standards. Pupils of all abilities are enabled to find success and thereby grow in confidence. Pupils are provided with excellent opportunities in the curriculum and through the very extensive extra-curricular activities. There is high quality provision for those who find learning difficult and for the gifted and talented. Though teaching is excellent overall, a few lessons are insufficiently well planned. Marking is generally strong, though there is some variation in its quality. Pupils' work is generally executed to a very high standard, with some limitation due to the availability of computer-related equipment and access to the internet.
- 2.2 Pupils' personal development is of the highest quality. Behaviour at virtually all times is exemplary. Pupils take pride in their demeanour, their dedication to earnest academic effort and their care and consideration for others. The spiritual life of the college is very strong and pupils appreciate the many opportunities for calm and reflection. They demonstrate a strong moral awareness. Pupils' social skills are exceptionally well developed. They greatly value the wealth of cultural opportunities to which the college gives them access. Pupils are exceptionally well looked after. Provision for boarding pupils ensures that all are happy and thrive; the atmosphere of the boarding houses is that of a happy family home. The school is aware that traffic circulation on the site could pose a potential hazard to pupils.
- 2.3 Arrangements for safeguarding and welfare meet all requirements and are the epitome of good practice. Parents are exceptionally positive about the way the college provides for their children. The excellent governance of the college is adroit in facilitating strategic development and in stewardship of the enduring traditions and objectives of the college. The college is exceptionally well led and managed by the headmaster and senior staff. Some senior and middle leaders are new to their roles and monitoring and evaluation of the work of the college is being stepped-up.

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

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

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 college is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Raise all teaching to the quality of the best in the areas of lesson planning and marking.
2. Extend pupils' access to ICT facilities and the internet.
3. Reduce the potential risk to pedestrian safety by better control of traffic circulation.

### **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 overall achievement of the pupils is excellent, in line with the college's aims. Pupils show strong knowledge of subjects across the curriculum; most command impressive understanding and skill. The great majority of pupils have very secure literacy skills: their writing is generally very competent; they can analyse poetry and other texts lucidly; they engage in conversation and present themselves orally with aplomb. Mathematical skills are strong; they are applied with precision in, for instance, geography and science. Pupils respond very positively to the very extensive physical education and sports coaching provided, and impressive skills are evident in hockey, rugby and many other pursuits.
- 3.2 Talents are cultivated to a high standard in the wealth of extra-curricular pursuits that stimulate vigorous endeavour in sports, music, the arts and many other activities. Pupils demonstrated admirable talent and proficiency in a concert which featured several solo performances. In the craft club, pupils quickly mastered delicate manipulation of silvered wire in making jewellery to an impressive standard. Pupils have won many accolades over the past year: biology Olympiad medal; national mathematics certificates of merit; Fitzwilliam College essay prize for economics; 23 pupils at grade 8 in an instrument or singing (6 with distinction); 17 distinctions in drama examinations; 38 Duke of Edinburgh's (D of E) gold Awards; county champions in boys' hockey, girls' netball, and national participation at high level in rugby and swimming – and many more. There is impressive success in winning places at universities, with high numbers embarking on courses such as medicine.
- 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. Results at GCSE have been far above the national average for maintained schools and similar to the national average for maintained selective schools. Over the same period, results at A level have been above the national average for maintained schools and at about the national average for maintained selective schools. Progress at all levels is good. The GCSE results are good in relation to pupils' abilities; pupils in Years 7 to 11 make above average progress when compared with pupils of similar ability nationally. The college's rigorous comparison of GCSE and subsequent A level outcomes shows that pupils in the sixth form generally do well in relation to their starting points. In lessons throughout the college, the pupils' enthusiasm and diligence, together with engaging teaching and high expectations, ensure that they learn very effectively and make good progress. The college enables pupils with EAL to make rapid headway with communication skills and across the curriculum. Pupils identified as having SEND have excellent support in small withdrawal groups and are generally able to make very effective progress. Throughout the college, boys and girls make equally strong progress. A range of initiatives since the previous inspection has stimulated the achievement of gifted and talented pupils: it is now exceptionally high.
- 3.4 The pupils show excellent attitudes to their work and life at the college. For example, younger rugby players gave keen attention to improvement of their skills and stamina in rucking, and older swimmers were eager to build and monitor their cardiovascular fitness by a gruelling endurance swimming regime. Pupils are highly diligent in response to the excellent teaching: prep and research assignments are



often completed to an impressive standard, though lack of readily available computer-related resources and access to the internet can be a limitation for boarders and others who do their prep at school. They work extremely well individually and cooperatively in groups. A few lessons were presented almost entirely by pupils, who demonstrated their excellent research, note-making and presentation skills. In the sixth form, work for the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) has empowered pupils to write and speak cogently about, for instance, how counter insurgency in Afghanistan might draw messages from the strategies of T E Lawrence in Arabia, how the technical versatility of fabrics affects developments in fashion, and the analysis of risk and safety protocols in horse-eventing. Sixth-formers anticipating university admission interviews can express themselves with confidence, eloquence and wit.

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

- 3.5 The excellent curriculum is broad and balanced. Its very good academic and excellent extra-curricular provision provides exceptionally well for all ages, needs and abilities and promotes high achievement. It is fundamental to the achievement of the college's aim to provide a high quality all-round education.
- 3.6 The newly introduced curriculum plan and timetable provide more time for extra-curricular activities. Pupils from Years 10 to 13 benefit from the Tuesday afternoon programme of activities which include a wide range of various sports, drama, dance, cookery, community service, DIY and the combined cadet force (CCF). The new curriculum is closely monitored and evaluated with a view to possible further improvement.
- 3.7 There is a wide range of academic subjects. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 includes two modern languages and Latin. Options at GCSE include the three separate sciences and opportunity to study two languages. The subjects offered at AS and A level provide well for the aptitudes and aspirations of the sixth-formers; some study five subjects. All the standard academic subjects are offered, plus philosophy, theatre studies, music technology, physical education, dance and photography. This is enriched by a general studies programme which includes visiting speakers, such as representatives from both the Palestinian and Jewish viewpoints on Middle East issues. In addition, most sixth-formers have the opportunity to achieve an EPQ, which develops research and project management skills and provides stretch and challenge for all levels of ability: it is equivalent to half an A level.
- 3.8 There is an excellent programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) for all ages, including a very comprehensive careers programme, and outside speakers are invited in to enhance it, for example, with an informative talk from the local fire brigade on water safety to pupils in Years 7 and 8. There is excellent provision in withdrawal groups for pupils with SEND and EAL; however, very occasionally some would benefit from more assistance in normal classes.
- 3.9 The very popular extra-curricular clubs after school and on Saturdays provide a wide variety of activities, including chess, drama, astronomy, cookery, dance, art, craft and Chinese. An extensive programme of music and drama supports the pupils' aesthetic and creative development and achievement is very high in these areas.

Sport is a very strong feature and very popular with both boys and girls, contributing to excellence in aspirations and a healthy lifestyle.

- 3.10 There is an extensive programme of day and residential trips including an annual visit to Lourdes and opportunities to attend retreats. There are regular visits to France, Germany and Spain. There has been a recent trip to Greece and an art and music trip to New York is planned. A full programme of outdoor activities, including CCF and D of E expeditions, and field-work, extends and enriches the pupils' experience. Pupils can also go horse riding and sailing.
- 3.11 Pupils demonstrate a sense of responsibility and care and concern for others through community service and charity fundraising. Community links are strong, and fostered through placements: pupils regularly visit the elderly and work with children and in local hospitals.

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

- 3.12 Teaching is excellent overall. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection, almost all was at least good and much was excellent. Teachers know their pupils well and in general, lessons are planned with a good variety of activities that are well chosen for their purpose and that engage the pupils' interest and enthusiasm. This engenders the pupils' best efforts and earnest commitment to learning. For example, in a music lesson with younger pupils, they all wanted to answer every question, there was excellent recall of musical terms, and pupils worked very productively in groups. Teachers make pupils think and draw out their existing knowledge skilfully. For instance, in a geography lesson starting a new topic on deserts, a pupil usefully contributed the information that Antarctica is a cold desert. Teachers skilfully foster independence in learning; a few lessons were presented almost entirely by pupils, who had prepared notes or posters from which they presented to the whole class, with interaction and discussion carefully orchestrated by the teacher. The small number of weaker lessons seen sometimes had insufficient variety of tasks, and teachers talked too much; pupils were not always given opportunity to participate fully and teachers did not always check their understanding sufficiently well during the lesson.
- 3.13 Pupils who find it difficult to learn have excellent support in small withdrawal groups. Many have specific difficulties due to dyslexia. The specialist staff tailor provision exceptionally well to their needs, which are set out in individual education plans. There is some excellent practice in subjects across the curriculum in adjusting lessons to take account of such information. In a French lesson, the care taken in planning for those with SEND was outstanding and, in consequence, the pupils made excellent progress in mastering a wide range of new vocabulary. Pupils joining the college from overseas are well catered for and are gaining confidence in English. In a small number of lessons, the needs of those with SEND are insufficiently accommodated. In contrast, there are now outstanding opportunities for gifted and talented pupils to excel, with many instances of exceptionally high achievement being promoted in the sixth form.
- 3.14 Overall, the quality of assessment is good. There is some excellent marking which is detailed and painstaking. Some sixth-form essay work was marked very closely, the feedback commentary giving a clear analysis of the strengths and suggests how improvements might be made. In comments, the tone and style is indicative of a strong rapport with the pupils and a respect for their skills and efforts. Meanwhile, with quite large younger classes, some science books have detailed helpful

comment on almost every page. However, the quantity and quality of marking remains variable within and between departments. A few books seen by inspectors had little marking over the previous few weeks and occasionally comments were superficial.

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

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

- 4.1 The previous report evaluated the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as outstanding; it remains so. The strong ethos, rooted in the college's aim to provide the highest quality Catholic Christian education, shapes and informs pupils' personal development. They are self-aware, confident in themselves and show sincere concern and respect for others.
- 4.2 Pupils have outstanding spiritual awareness. They appreciate opportunities to encounter and engage with the timeless traditions of Christian spirituality. They share and contribute in daily chapel, house or year-group Masses, and in whole-school acts of worship and services. Pupils value highly the college's emphasis on times and places for spirituality and reflection, whether or not they choose to follow the Christian faith. Assemblies provide time for inner reflection. In a whole-school chapel-assembly, pupils were guided to think of the importance of trusting in God and giving more to life. Retreats are considered by pupils as an important part of their personal development, providing well for their spiritual needs.
- 4.3 Pupils demonstrate a clear sense of right and wrong. Moral problems are examined rigorously, for example, in theology lessons. In a lower-sixth class, moral questions were debated using theories from ethical philosophers in relation to modern day issues researched by students on global warming and deforestation. Pupils comment favourably about the PSHCE programme which embraces a profusion of moral and citizenship issues. The family atmosphere in the house settings allows moral concerns to be discussed less formally. Older pupils speak enthusiastically about taking responsibility for younger pupils, in their houses, in a paired reading programme and in drama activities.
- 4.4 The pupils' social skills are extremely well-developed. They are polite and courteous; their behaviour is impeccable. They relish leadership opportunities, for example in pupil-led charities and in the CCF. Relationships between pupils from a range of faiths and cultures are excellent. Pupils say that those from overseas rapidly become part of the community, adding to its vibrant diversity. Strong links with the local community are evident, for example in the sixth-form's assistance with local elderly care.
- 4.5 Cultural development is outstanding. The superb standard of the college's own cultural life gives pupils rich experiences of drama, music and art. Numerous productions each year offer many opportunities to participate directly: pupils rise admirably to the challenge. All have a keen appreciation of cultural traditions as a means of encapsulating and communicating human experience. Pupils intimated in conversation that they consider themselves well-blessed in being able each day to enjoy the splendour of the college's location and the peaceful beauty of its buildings.

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

- 4.6 Pastoral care in the college is excellent, and is 'encouraging, supportive and disciplined', in line with the aims. Relationships between pupils and between staff and pupils are exceptionally good. Staff know pupils well as individuals and show them respect, engendering a confident sense of self-worth. Pupils know who to approach if they do have problems and they feel very well supported by both staff and older pupils. Sixth-form pupils' representatives have regular meetings with the headmaster, where issues of the day can be aired with candour.
- 4.7 Safeguarding arrangements are highly effective and the college is punctilious in ensuring that all adults have been appropriately checked before working with children. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection. There is good provision for pupils who are unwell, and for the administration of medication, and due consideration has been given to the needs of pupils with limited mobility. The college medical centre is staffed by a resident matron and part-time nurse. There is good communication between the medical centre and relevant staff concerning pupils' health. Health related policies are unequivocal on matters of confidentiality and the protocols to be followed. Personal health records for each pupil and parental consents for treatment are kept and updated regularly. A healthy and balanced diet is enjoyed by pupils, and there are opportunities for them to bring any concerns about catering to the attention of the college. Admission and attendance registers are administered effectively, and absence is followed up meticulously. There are comprehensive behaviour and anti-bullying policies, but instances of poor behaviour are exceptionally rare. The college's promotion of sports and other physical and adventurous activities is excellent.
- 4.8 The college has good risk assessment systems for all areas of its activities, including its historic buildings, and risks from fire and other hazards are properly attended to. The school is working hard to improve traffic circulation on the site.
- 4.9 The provision for EAL pupils is very good, with an induction programme for pupils arriving at the college, training for staff, and liaison with departments with regard to the needs of each pupil for learning support.
- 4.10 Pupils have access to a well-resourced careers department and they receive careers guidance from Year 7 to Year 13. Advice given includes some from outside agencies. Students presenting applications for prestigious university courses have been very well briefed about the setting-out of their applications and preparing themselves for interview.

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

- 4.11 Although only a minority of pupils board, boarding is central to the life of the college and the provision is excellent. A boarding inspection was conducted by Ofsted in December 2009 and is the subject of a separate report, which is available on the Ofsted website: the quality rating was 'outstanding' and there were no significant regulatory shortcomings. This inspection has considered boarding in the whole-college context only.
- 4.12 Each of the three boarding houses contains a mix of full boarders, weekly boarders and day pupils, which helps to make all pupils feel part of the same community. Staff in charge of each house know the pupils very well, are seen as approachable by the pupils, and offer excellent pastoral care. Relationships between all pupils are very strong and the reduced numbers who remain at college over the weekend mean that year groups mix easily and pupils do not consider differing ages as a barrier to friendship. Younger pupils in both boys' and girls' houses often see those in the sixth form as sympathetic ears when they have problems. A wide range of nationalities is represented in each house; boarders see the mix as a strength and an opportunity to learn about other cultures.
- 4.13 A good range of activities is offered in the evenings and at weekends, with some pupils more enthusiastic about them than others. Girls and boys enjoy the opportunity to visit each other's houses on most evenings and the change to Saturday school, with lessons replaced by a later start and then activities, has near unanimous approval. Sunday trips are popular.
- 4.14 Some boys perceive that facilities are better in the girls' houses, but all houses have large, well-furnished common rooms. Some other areas in the boarding houses are a little 'tired,' but sixth form rooms, particularly, are spacious, and a rolling programme of refurbishment is taking place.
- 4.15 During prep pupils work well and there is a purposeful atmosphere, although the inability to access the internet on their own laptops means that there is a queue for the house computers.

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

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

- 5.1 Excellent governance ensures the foundations of strong educational vision and financial prudence which underpin the college's outstanding success in achieving its aims. Through a highly effective network of committees and visits to the college, governors are well acquainted with the college's strengths and weaknesses. They are alert in their monitoring role, and take opportunity to obtain a reliable impression of how pupils and staff feel. They are unstinting in their diligent efforts to foster the consolidation of effective provision in the college and advance it further. There is close and effective consultation between senior staff and governors on guiding principles and business matters. Governors are well informed by reports from the headmaster, the bursar and other senior staff, and they are adroit in their strategic planning. Due attention has been given to the recommendations of the previous inspection report.
- 5.2 The governing body takes very seriously its responsibilities with regard to regulatory matters. Governors make sure that policies and practice relating to child protection and pupils' welfare and health and safety are secure and applied correctly. They are careful in financial planning and in the maintenance and development of the fabric of the college. They are reflective in considering ways to perpetuate the college's ethos of 'gentle Catholicism' in an evolving context and as the college moves forward in serving an increasingly diverse community. The governors bring wisdom and professional expertise to their stewardship of the college. Their effective procedures secure a bright future.

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

- 5.3 The outstanding leadership and management identified at the previous inspection has continued under the present headmaster, who has been in post for two years, and the senior leadership team. Leadership promotes a clear vision of the interpretation of the college's aims in the present context, and strives constantly for excellence in the provision that the college offers: leadership is outstanding. Areas for improvement are tackled with insight and determination. In a range of recent adjustments to policy and practice, the headmaster has the overwhelming support of the staff and that of the vast majority of pupils and their parents. The college's leadership has exceptionally strong support from parents, who greatly value the way the college upholds its traditions, and makes the best of pupils' life-chances in the present climate. The current project for the building of a new sports hall is exceptionally well conceived, with prospect of enhancing the college's excellence in sporting endeavour yet further.
- 5.4 The college's self-evaluation is well informed and candid, and senior staff have a realistic picture of, for example, the strengths and areas for development within teaching. Plans for the future are based on clear analysis of what is going well and where there might be scope for development. The senior team has recently been supplemented by the appointment of three assistant headteachers for the development of learning, staff development and organisation of extra-curricular provision. Several subject departments have new leaders and there have been a number of recent appointments amongst heads of houses. The college is moving forward with closer evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and marking, and

ways of coaching improvement. At departmental level, leadership is reflective, strives for excellence in every element of a department's work, and is based on a culture of respect amongst dedicated professionals. The college recognises that its aspiration to make all provision of the highest quality calls for the continuing vigilance of leaders at all levels.

- 5.5 The college runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis. There are clear lines of responsibility within the senior team and amongst those who hold middle management roles. The point for improvement in the previous inspection regarding provision for gifted and talented pupils has been attended to exceptionally well. Minor issues about health and safety in parts of the premises have been tackled well. There remains some work to be done on improving all marking to the standard of the best. Arrangements for checking the suitability of staff and other adults who work with pupils are the quintessence of good practice. The college is highly successful in recruiting and retaining good staff. They are properly trained in safeguarding. The college is very well managed.

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

- 5.6 The links with parents at the college are excellent, and parents feel fully involved in the education of their children. Answers to a questionnaire show overwhelming approval in nearly every category. There is particular praise for the all-round nature of the education provided, the outstanding pastoral care, and the fact that all areas of college life are celebrated, not just the successes of the talented few. Letters praising pupils and events, many of which are written by parents, are kept in a compliments file which is readily available for friends and visitors to read.
- 5.7 Parents receive full reports or attend a parents' meeting in each term and grade summaries are sent out each half term. Some parents would like more comments on the half-term reports, but inspectors found that the end of term reports are detailed and well written.
- 5.8 Communication between the college and parents is easy and efficient. House staff and other teachers welcome parental contact. The vast majority of parents feel that the college deals with any problems sensitively and efficiently and inspection team considers that the college responds in a fair and balanced way.
- 5.9 The newly improved website is welcomed by parents. Parents and prospective parents are provided with all required information by the website or on request. Access to information by the website is easy, and the site allows parents to send comments directly to the headmaster. The headmaster also meets a small group of parents from each year group every year to talk about issues relevant to that particular age group. Parents receive the weekly "Prior Knowledge" newsletter as an email which gives them information and comments on past and future events, and the planned internet portal is intended to improve communication further.
- 5.10 Parents are made to feel very welcome at the college, not just at matches and concerts, but also at the less public events, such as Sunday Mass which many parents attend regularly. Parents are also involved in Saturday Active, both as leaders and learners, where they join pupils and staff in some activities. The Society of Parents and Friends organises regular social and fundraising events at the college, where attendance ranges from a small group to several hundred, which are seen as important opportunities for parents and staff to mix.



- 5.11 The college's complaints policy meets all requirements. There have been no formal complaints in recent years.

**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 Jim Bennetts	Reporting Inspector
Mr Stephen Cole	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Michael Dodd	Head of department, ISA school
Mr Richard Knott	Deputy headteacher, HMC school
Mrs Lisa Laws	Headteacher, GSA school
Mrs Lorraine Winch-Johnson	Head of department and head of house, GSA school