



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**ROCHESTER INDEPENDENT COLLEGE**

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Rochester Independent College

Full Name of College	<b>Rochester Independent College</b>
DfE Number	<b>887/6004</b>
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Head	<b>Mr Brian Pain</b>
Proprietors	<b>Mr Brian Pain, Mr Alistair Brownlow, Ms Pauline Bailey</b>
Age Range	<b>11 to 19</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>258</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (161 boys; 97 girls)</b>
Numbers by Age	11-19: <b>258</b>
Number of Day Pupils	Total: <b>204</b>
Number of Boarders	Total: <b>54</b> Full: <b>39</b> Weekly: <b>15</b>
Inspection dates	<b>13 Mar 2012 to 16 Mar 2012</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. This is the first inspection since the school was accredited by the ISI.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed through the following link: [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). Search for Independent School Standards Regulations and enter date 2010, to find Schedule 1, Parts 1-7.

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

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

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

Under Government arrangements, the inspection of boarding became an integrated part of ISI inspections from 1 September 2011. This inspection contains 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, personal development and welfare. Boarding inspections were previously carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills. The relevant 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, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

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

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

**same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.**

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

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

### **Inspectors**

Mr Peter McGregor	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Lucy Elphinstone	Team Inspector (Head of Sixth Form, GSA school)
Mr George Fisher	Team Inspector (Former Headmaster, HMC school)
Mrs Deborah Leek-Bailey	Team Inspector (Headmistress, ISA school)
Mrs Linda Trevethick	Co-ordinating Inspector for Boarding
Mr Adrian Aylward	Team Inspector for Boarding (Headmaster, GSA school)

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 The college aims to give students a happily distinctive, enjoyable and successful experience of school in an international environment, underpinning this with small classes, and high quality teaching and pastoral care. The college ethos is defined as non-denominational and broadly humanist, designed to foster respect, challenge prejudice and develop an imaginative and informed attitude. The college aims to maintain excellent examination results, through a curriculum that meets students' needs and a safe and supportive environment, to respond to the local community and support staff development.
- 1.2 Three proprietors have responsibility for the college, and take policy decisions jointly. They include the founder and majority shareholder who retains an oversight of all aspects of the work taking place.
- 1.3 The college opened in 1984 and is in the centre of Rochester. It has expanded from a sixth-form tutorial college to an 11-19 college; the first Year 7 entry was in 2006. It is based on a two-acre campus. Teaching and learning take place in a range of buildings, several of which are listed as of historical significance. Boarders are accommodated in six houses within the campus.
- 1.4 In 2009, the college was accredited to the Independent Schools Association. Since that time, new teaching and boarding accommodation has been acquired, specialist teaching facilities and student social areas have been updated, and the college has focused on developing as three distinct sections: lower (Years 7 to 9), middle (Years 10 to 11) and the sixth form (Years 12 to 13).
- 1.5 The number of students on roll is 258, of whom 97 are female and 161 male. Currently 54 students are boarders, all of whom are over the age of 16. Years 7 to 11 have 101 students and the sixth form has 157. For about a tenth of the college population, English is an additional language. These students need support with their acquisition of literacy skills. The majority of students are from England. Fifteen different nationalities are otherwise represented, mainly from Europe and Thailand. Students come from a wide variety of backgrounds.
- 1.6 The college accepts students into all years. About half of the sixth form join the college after taking AS and/or A2 elsewhere, to retake one or more subjects. The ability profile of the college is broadly in line with the national average, but varies greatly from year to year. About one-fifth of the students have been identified as disabled or having special educational needs. These needs are mainly dyslexia. A very small number of students have statements of special educational needs. A few students need specialist help with their educational needs to enable them to join fully in the academic life of the college.
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the college. The year group nomenclature used by the college and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following table.

College	NC name
Year 7	Year 7
Year 8	Year 8
Year 9	Year 9
Year 10	Year 10
Year 11	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13



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

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

- 2.1 At GCSE and A level, students are successful, making good progress and achieving broadly average attainment. Academic achievement in the sixth form is higher than in the lower and middle schools. A highly flexible approach to planning the sixth-form curriculum, with choice from a very wide range of subjects, helps to meet the needs of each student. Students in Years 7 to 11 benefit from a strong emphasis on creative aspects of the curriculum. This is counterbalanced by a relative weakness in technology. An excellent range of visits greatly enhances the curriculum. The quality of teaching contributes well to students' achievements. Lesson planning to meet the needs of students with disabilities or special educational needs is not sufficiently detailed, because staff are not well informed about these needs. In the sixth form a substantial proportion of the teaching is of high quality. It is inconsistent overall, however. Marking is unsatisfactory in some students' books and, in some lessons, work is not matched effectively to the wide range of students' knowledge and ability. A rigorous testing regime in the sixth form informs teachers' planning and promotes examination success.
- 2.2 Students' personal development is excellent. Students relate exceptionally well to one another. They are aware of the impact of their actions on others and show high levels of self-control. They are courteous and appreciate the support they receive from their teachers. Behaviour is excellent. Students' spirituality is well developed. The use of first names, and informal attire worn by students and staff, generate a relaxed working environment. Personal sixth-form tutors are highly effective and play a key role in maximising students' development. Boarders are well cared for and thrive in the caring, pleasant environment. They greatly enjoy their boarding experience.
- 2.3 Leadership and management are good. Management systems, such as the use of data to track progress, are weaker than the vision and direction for the college, which are extremely clear and have a major, positive impact on staff and students. Governance is sound. The principals, as the college proprietors, know the college very well but their closeness to the daily routines means that review and monitoring of what takes place is insufficiently robust and inconsistencies remain unaddressed. College development planning has satisfactory structure but lacks sufficient detail. Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Requirements such as those concerning safeguarding and child protection, first aid and health and safety, including fire systems, are met. Mistakes have been made in the student admission register and in following staff appointment procedures; medical room facilities do not meet requirements. The recommendations of the previous inspection report have all been successfully addressed, as have most of those of the last boarding report.

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

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

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

2.4 The college does not meet all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010, and therefore it is required to:

- ensure that safe recruitment procedures are followed [Part 3, paragraph 7(a) and (b), under Welfare, health and safety];
- ensure that the admission register is maintained in accordance with requirements [Part 3, paragraph 17, under Welfare, health and safety];
- ensure that appropriate checks are made against the ISA barred list/List 99 and that enhanced criminal record checks are made as required [Part 4, paragraph 19(a) and (c)];
- ensure that the Single Central Register of appointments is complete [Part 4, paragraph 22(3)(ii) and (iv)];
- provide appropriate facilities for students who are ill [Part 5, paragraph 23(k), under Premises and accommodation].

2.5 The college does not meet all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011, and therefore it must:

- ensure that accommodation for boarders has appropriate separation for genders [National Minimum Standard 5.2, under Boarding Accommodation].

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

2.6 In addition to the above regulatory action points, the college is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Improve consistency in the quality of teaching and marking, through more effective monitoring and support, especially for Years 7 to 11 and for students with particular learning needs.
2. Enhance the curriculum in the lower and middle schools by increasing emphasis on technological knowledge and understanding.
3. Improve the effectiveness of some management systems, including that relating to the use of data to track students' progress through the college.
4. Establish a system of external support and accountability for the co-principals as proprietors, in their joint roles, planning for the success of the college.
5. Make the college development plan more useful as a measure of ongoing development by including boarding issues, timescales, staff and resource implications and success criteria.

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

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

- 3.1 The quality of students' achievements and learning are good.
- 3.2 The college meets its aim to give students a distinctive, enjoyable and successful learning experience. Students are not formally assessed on entry to identify their starting knowledge and abilities but evidence of previous examinations indicates that attainment varies substantially from year to year. Attainment is broadly average overall with some students attaining the highest possible grades in a wide range of curriculum areas at A level. 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 in GCSE and at A level have been similar to the national average for maintained schools although with significant variation between years. Results in 2011 were broadly similar to those in 2010, with about two-thirds of GCSE candidates gaining 5 A\*-C grades, and over half of A level grades being A\*-B. This level of attainment indicates that students, including the more able and those for whom English is an additional language, make good progress in relation to students of similar ability. Students with disabilities and those with special educational needs are not always as successful as their peers because staff are unaware of how to plan for their particular needs. Progress is more rapid in the sixth form where work is better matched to students' individual needs. Sixth-form students achieve places at their chosen place of higher education, several going on to attend the most popular universities. Each year students are successful in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme at bronze, silver and gold levels. Students regularly achieve speaking and listening and drama qualifications.
- 3.3 Students speak confidently and at length, expressing their ideas and reasoning logically. They listen to their peers and their teachers extremely well. This sometimes becomes passive learning when teachers' talking dominates lessons. Students' writing skills are good, although errors are not always identified where marking is superficial. Good numeracy skills are achieved through effective teaching and learning in mathematics lessons and a range of subjects, particularly the sciences. Students' creative skills are very strong, nurtured through several subjects and the excellent range of theatre and other visits. Students' skills in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are sound, developed through a range of subjects, although this is teacher dependent. Physical development of students in Years 7 to 11 is secured through attendance at a local sports centre, where a range of activities is available. Students appreciate the on-site college fitness suite and games court, which they use in non-contact time and after the end of the day.
- 3.4 Students' attitudes to their work and learning are exemplary. The warmth and relaxed college atmosphere give students the confidence to participate in lessons without fear of being labelled a failure. A number join the college having had negative experiences at other schools, yet they settle quickly and experience success in the small classes, responding to the highly supportive college ethos. At the core of the students' positive attitudes is their enjoyment of college life. Academic pressures in the sixth form are high and much greater than in the middle and lower school, yet exceptionally positive attitudes are apparent.

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

- 3.5 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision throughout the college is good.
- 3.6 The curriculum is broad and effectively covers all the required areas of learning. It is entirely consistent with the college's aim to offer a curriculum which attracts and caters for a wide range of students' interests and abilities. The curriculum is well planned and very flexible in the sixth form. Generally, provision is sound for students with disabilities and those with special educational needs as suitable courses are available and all students are included in the wider activities on offer across the college. A few parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that the college has not provided sufficient help for such students. Evidence showed that no students have individual education plans, so often teachers do not have the information they need for planning activities to address particular needs. The needs of more able students in the sixth form are supported well through the extensive range of courses and the many additional sessions made available to all students. For younger students, setting by ability in a range of subjects helps staff to match work to individual needs.
- 3.7 Creative skills at all stages are very effectively promoted through, amongst others, media, art and drama. Opportunities also exist for students to take music lessons outside the timetable, although numbers are small. Off-site physical education sessions enable students to develop their skills in a wide variety of sports, such as skiing and martial arts. The grounds and garden, extensively developed by the students, provide a valuable resource for curricular enhancement. Technological awareness is under-developed within the college. Teaching of ICT is planned through a cross-curricular approach in Years 7 to 11, but this is not monitored effectively and implementation is inconsistent. Lower- and middle-school students follow a good programme in personal, social, and health education, including careers guidance, which they value. This is a significant improvement upon the provision referred to in the previous inspection report. At GCSE level, students are offered an extensive range of academic courses including art and history in the core provision. The choice of GCSE subjects is tailored to individual students' needs, aptitudes and interests. The college focuses on offering students a very wide range of A level courses, which can be studied over one or two years, rather than providing a general programme. Its flexibility in making the necessary timetabling arrangements to accommodate choices is an excellent feature of the curriculum. In mathematics at A level, for example, the college accommodates courses set by all three of the main examining boards. .
- 3.8 The curriculum is supported by a small range of lunch-time clubs such as sewing, magic and film. The programme of activities and trips after the college day is excellent, including academic workshops and visits to theatres and art exhibitions. These opportunities enrich students' experiences and are greatly valued by them.
- 3.9 Other notable extra-curricular activity is apparent in the increasingly popular Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, speech and drama programmes, and various sports where students represent a number of local clubs and organisations, sometimes to county level. The students also benefit from good links with the community and a number assume leadership roles within groups such as scouts, sea cadets and guides.

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

- 3.10 The quality of teaching is good.
- 3.11 Teaching contributes well to students' achievements and enables students to make good progress, reflecting the aim that effective teaching should underpin an enjoyable and successful school experience. A high proportion of sixth-form teaching is excellent, although the overall quality is inconsistent, with a few unsatisfactory sessions. The picture is similar but not quite as effective in the lower and middle schools. In most lessons, tasks are well planned and structured, the pace of work is appropriate and students are fully engaged in learning.
- 3.12 Teachers have good and often excellent knowledge and understanding of their subjects, particularly in the sixth form where challenging work engages and motivates students. In a Year 13 history lesson, where students explored the development of the Labour Party, a high calibre debate, informed by excellent questioning from the teacher, resulted in rapid and extensive learning. Demanding questions and clear explanations usually facilitate learning well throughout the college, including for the more able. In a minority of lessons, work is not matched to students' prior knowledge. During these sessions teachers tend to give students information rather than explain and build on what they already know.
- 3.13 Relationships between staff and students, and amongst students, are extremely positive and help to raise students' motivation and enjoyment. They commented on how accessible staff are and how the additional help they receive outside lesson time is instrumental in improving their understanding. Students feel valued by teachers and this enables them confidently to contribute in lessons and seek further advice when needed.
- 3.14 Independent learning is a particular strength because teachers give students opportunities to engage with the work and experience success. The use of individual assessment boards, which students hold up after writing answers, is very effective. Teachers can see in an instant whether each student understands the question. Answering examination questions is a key aspect of the work of many A level lessons, enabling students to know how to maximise their marks. Some staff expect students to discuss ideas in pairs, which involves all the students in the class and reinforces understanding.
- 3.15 ICT is used infrequently in lessons. Where it is used effectively, modern technology motivates the students extremely well. In an excellent Year 8 English lesson, a study of 'fairies' imagery involved the generation of electronic presentations where historical discrepancies were identified. Small classes, often very small in the sixth form, enable one-to-one support to be provided. In many sessions this maximises individual progress. Where teaching is weaker, insufficient attention is given to meeting the needs of lower attaining students or those with particular learning needs. Staff are not always aware of individual specific needs, or strategies which could address them. However, the curriculum needs of the very small number of students who have statements of special educational needs are met through appropriate teaching and support. The specialist help given to students for whom English is an additional language is effective in enhancing their English speaking and writing skills.
- 3.16 The quality of marking is inconsistent. It is usually good in the sixth form, with attention to detail, and many past paper questions carefully marked with guidelines

on how to improve. In Years 7 to 11, some work is unmarked or cursorily ticked, with few targets set or any indication given on what would improve the quality.

## **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 students is excellent.
- 4.2 The college is successful in fulfilling its aims of fostering respect, challenging prejudice and developing an imaginative and informed attitude that leads to improvements in students' personal and public lives.
- 4.3 Students appreciate their relationship with their immediate environment and a calm and respectful atmosphere characterises their movements around the college. The mood is relaxed and inclusive, enabling the students to feel secure, develop their personalities and appreciate their role within the community. Although there is no formal act of collective worship, in line with the humanist ethos of the college, a sense of spiritual understanding is cultivated through an appreciation of the natural world, and through the strong emphasis on creative subjects. All Year 10 students study art, and the high-quality work reflects a sense of wonder. An outdoor garden is being created by the students and the grounds are landscaped to offer places of quiet contemplation.
- 4.4 Students show a mature understanding of each other's feelings and situations and a clear moral sense in describing their own needs and the effect of their actions on others. They feel that there is little bullying or unkindness and attribute the happy atmosphere to the fact that 'everyone knows everyone'. The younger students appreciate the importance of tolerance and patience within a small year group, and manage their disagreements with great maturity. Older students are tolerant and calm, and behavioural issues are rare. Sanctions are few in an atmosphere which values respect highly, and rudeness is not tolerated. Rewards usually take the form of praise and celebration of good work, and boarders also benefit from college excursions. Compulsory drama in Year 10 ensures that everyone has the opportunity to develop social and moral awareness, and gives those with particular emotional needs a forum to express themselves.
- 4.5 Throughout the college the students show an excellent level of social maturity. Girls and boys in the lower school have strong friendships and celebrate each other's achievements and strengths. They deal swiftly and effectively with any disagreements, and work and play collaboratively. The ethos of the college does not encourage competitive opportunities, however, and some of the younger students express a wish for more interaction in sport, clubs and activities, particularly at lunchtime. Similarly, traditional forms of leadership and teamwork are not actively encouraged, and some regret the lack of opportunity to develop these skills. Instead, there is a celebration of individuality and a form of leadership which is not authoritative or 'obedience-based'.
- 4.6 A very strong sense of cultural awareness exists in the college. Boarders from other countries are warmly welcomed and feel integrated and supported. Great care is taken to facilitate every student's entry into the college and to ensure that they feel at ease with the community's traditions and systems. Students learn about other faiths during the college festival in the summer, and subjects such as modern foreign languages, the social sciences and English support an appreciation of the way other cultures live, work and worship. Students have a good sense of the wider and global communities and are involved in fundraising and charity work. Visits to the theatre

and art exhibitions give a particularly strong understanding of European culture and of the wider world, and prepare students well for the world beyond the college.

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

- 4.7 The college provides excellent support and guidance which enhances students' personal development. It is highly successful in its aim to develop self-knowledge and self-esteem.
- 4.8 Relationships between staff and students are excellent. An 'open door policy' means that students feel secure and valued, confident that they can approach a member of staff at any time. The sense of community is increased by the inclusion of support staff in the monitoring of students' welfare. Throughout the college, pastoral discussions amongst staff, parents and students are good, especially so in the more formalised sixth-form provision, where tutoring is exemplary. Students meet fortnightly with their personal tutor, who supports their academic and personal progress and guides them in university and career advice. Year 10 and 11 tutoring focuses well on GCSE preparation and sixth-form study choices. No individual tutorials are held formally in the lower school, but a student may ask for help at any time, and issues are dealt with promptly, with immediate communication to all concerned.
- 4.9 Students enjoy a wide range of healthy and nutritious food almost entirely prepared on site. They may also bring packed lunches. Supervision of meals is minimal, however, with little monitoring of what students eat.
- 4.10 There are few instances of poor behaviour, harassment or bullying, and most incidents amount only to momentary unkindness. Parents report that their children are well looked after and achieve good standards of behaviour. Staff are very understanding of the prior difficulties of some students, and the emphasis is on tolerance, treating all with the greatest respect.
- 4.11 The college has an appropriate plan to improve educational access for students with disabilities and those with special educational needs. The college site can make access to buildings difficult but curriculum facilities for these students are improving over time.
- 4.12 College councils are not being used to maximum effect to hear students' views. The excellent informal ethos, however, and small classes reduce the need for more formal means of communication. Students state clearly that they raise any concerns they have and that action follows.

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

- 4.13 The arrangements for welfare, health and safety are sound.
- 4.14 Staff show good care for the well-being of students in accordance with the college's aims. They have had appropriate child protection training, including the designated child protection officers, and all know the college's high expectations with regard to students' welfare. The prevention of bullying is given a high priority and first aid procedures are thorough and understood. Students are well supervised and appropriate praise for effort, success and conduct raises students' self-esteem and enjoyment. Healthy lifestyles are encouraged through the personal, social and health education curriculum. Attendance registers for students in Years 7 to 11 are completed as required and the registration system for the sixth form ensures that



staff know the whereabouts of students lesson by lesson. The college admission register is inaccurate because students' names have been deleted as they left. The register is now completed and maintained as required.

- 4.15 There have been occasional lapses in the implementation of staff appointment procedures. Records show that safeguarding requirements and the single central register did not meet requirements in the recent past. All safeguarding documentation and practice now have regard to official guidance as required, including training in child protection.
- 4.16 Students say that they feel safe and are pleased to help each other with their work and in general. Fire practices are held regularly, and the college takes seriously the need to minimise the risks of fire. Risk assessments are in place for all main areas and activities around college, and for the many visits provided for day and boarding students. The health and safety of students and staff are taken very seriously. Annual testing of portable electrical appliances takes place, addressing the previous inspection's recommendation. Arrangements for students who are ill do not meet statutory requirements as no appropriate washing and toilet facilities are provided in or near the medical centre.

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

- 4.17 The overall quality of boarding is good.
- 4.18 The recommendations from the Ofsted inspection of boarding in 2009 have been completed with the exception of robust recording and monitoring by the senior management team of college records and staff supervision.
- 4.19 The outcomes for boarders are good. Their personal development is strongly promoted and they show high levels of confidence and maturity. Boarders state that the experience provides very effective preparation for life beyond college. They enjoy a degree of freedom and responsibility. Boarders appreciate that they can make their own decisions, managing both their free time and out-of-hours study time. They show great tolerance towards others and interact very well with their peers and adults. They receive advice about personal safety and an effective boarders' council meets weekly with senior boarding staff. Boarders feel that their views are heard and do make a difference. Parents who responded in a questionnaire spoke very positively of the benefits of the boarding experience to their child's progress and development, a view supported by inspection evidence.
- 4.20 Boarders said how much they enjoy being part of the college. They like the ethos and informal approach and many reflect that they are now happier and more able to learn successfully than in their previous colleges. Relationships are excellent among boarders, between boarders and staff and between boarders and day students. Students and adults show mutual respect for each other, and boarders are most appreciative of the care and support readily offered by their tutors and teachers.
- 4.21 The quality of provision and care in the boarding houses is good. From their initial welcome and careful induction arrangements, to the fortnightly tutor meetings, boarders are well cared for. Those with particular needs are supported individually to adapt to boarding life. Boarders receive very helpful guidance and advice when planning their transition into higher education. They feel safe and very well supported by the system of boarding which centres around the largest boarding house. The college provides good quality food which has substantial variety.

Supplementary to the food offered at meal times, boarders can prepare snacks and drinks in four of the boarding houses.

- 4.22 The arrangements for dealing with illness or injuries are satisfactory and all necessary procedures for handling medicines are in place. Boarders say that they are well cared for if they are unwell; they are able to phone for help and advice if they need it. A room is made available for any sick students who are too unwell to stay in their own rooms and staff are on hand to provide care. An additional nurse is available to the college should the incumbent fall ill. Each bedroom has a telephone and is secure with a lockable door. Staff carry a master key in case of emergency. All boarders are provided with facilities for securing their cash. Effective means exist for dealing with laundry and providing personal and stationery items.
- 4.23 Facilities are good in the largest boarding house where all students can meet to socialise. Students have use of two common rooms, one with a television, pool table and sound system. The other is a quieter room where staff are available to chat or support students doing their homework. There is access to a basketball/football area and a multi-gym in the college grounds, although records of who uses these facilities are unclear. Health and safety procedures for the facilities are properly managed. Boarders express satisfaction with the good range of voluntary activities available in the evenings and at weekends. Many choose to visit the nearby town centre in their free time. At weekends, about a quarter of the boarders go home and the remaining boarders enjoy a large measure of freedom, which they value.
- 4.24 The boarding accommodation across the seven houses, which are all close together, is comfortable and secure. Almost all boarders have single bedrooms. Standards of decoration and cleanliness are good and the houses are well maintained. Rooms are cleaned daily. All students praise the quality of the accommodation.
- 4.25 Boarders are able to keep in regular contact with their families through their own mobile phones and via the internet. The boarding team communicates with parents via email or phone as necessary. Parents are encouraged to contact the college, with any issue or query and they have access to a wealth of information on the college website. When parents or guardians visit the college, the boarding team arrange for them to meet appropriate members of staff.
- 4.26 Arrangements for boarders' welfare and safeguarding are sound, although some aspects of the evening supervision across the boarding houses lack clarity. Adequate separation of the genders, as required by the National Minimum Standards for boarding, is not in place in one house. Plans have been established to rectify this within a matter of weeks. Behaviour is excellent. There is a code of conduct with clear guidelines, for example for dealing with bullying should it occur. Students understand the rules and the college's expectations, and readily comply and meet them. They are confident that there will always be someone to turn to in case of need. They are aware of the relevant helpline numbers which are displayed in each bedroom. The name and contact number of the college's independent listener, whom students meet at the start of the academic year, are also displayed.
- 4.27 Leadership of the boarding houses is good. Management is satisfactory. Monitoring of procedures, such as supervision, is not rigorous enough. The boarding team are dedicated and hardworking. Staff support each other and the students well. The quality of leadership is strengthened by the close ties established between academic

and pastoral staff. The regular academic tutor meetings are essential elements. Members of the boarding team and resident tutors give their time very generously when they are not on duty. They are flexible and accompany evening activities as needed. Principles are clearly communicated and the boarding provision is a priority for the college, in line with its aims. Boarders are proud of the college and extremely loyal.

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

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

- 5.1 Governance of the college is sound.
- 5.2 The three proprietors, as co-principals, have a sound oversight of the college. They have an excellent understanding of students' personal development and a good knowledge of their achievements, including the overall educational standards of the college. They have ensured that students are benefitting from substantial developments in buildings, such as the new theatre and further teaching and library facilities that are about to come into use. The distinctive college aim that a broadly humanist ethos should be at its heart, promoting students' achievement, enjoyment and enhanced self-esteem, is very successfully implemented.
- 5.3 At times, proprietors do not distance themselves sufficiently from the college's day-to-day work and are less successful than they could be in challenging the status quo.
- 5.4 For the most part, the proprietors discharge their duties for safeguarding, welfare, health and safety satisfactorily, and are successful in ensuring that most statutory responsibilities are met. Policies are reviewed annually but staff appointments procedures have not always been followed rigorously, the college's student admission register is incomplete and the medical room facilities do not meet minimum requirements. Boarding requirements are not met in that the separation of genders in the accommodation does not meet the National Minimum Standards. The previous inspection report recommendations concerning the curriculum and health and safety issues have been fully resolved.

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

- 5.5 The overall quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians, is good.
- 5.6 The senior management team is effective in promoting the aims of the college, to give students a happily distinctive, fulfilling, enjoyable and successful experience. This outcome is reflected in the students' academic and other achievements and in the high standard of their personal development. Students make good progress, reaching average attainment overall in external examinations. Many transfer from other schools after disappointing experiences and achieve success, with greatly enhanced self-esteem. Overall leadership of the college has focused on the well-being and educational development of the students, and on creating the desired ethos; students often articulated their extremely positive views about college life. The fulfilment of the aim to foster mutual respect, challenge prejudice and to develop an imaginative and informed attitude, is exemplified by the students' excellent behaviour.
- 5.7 Appointments procedures are now clear and result in high quality staff who are suitable to work with children, and the single central register is securely maintained, although procedures for checking and recording have not been followed consistently in the past. Staff are suitably trained in their roles in relation to safeguarding, welfare, health and safety. The subject knowledge of teaching staff recruited by the

senior management team is excellent and teachers share the vision that the team has created. All show a strong commitment to the success of the college. The creation of a friendly community which enables students to realise their potential is the focus of all staff.

- 5.8 An annual appraisal system is in place for teachers, linked to self-review and some formal lesson observations. Notwithstanding students' success in gaining places in universities and colleges, inconsistencies in teaching reflect weaknesses in monitoring. Management systems are insufficiently robust with limited accountability of leaders and managers for their responsibilities.
- 5.9 Staff have appropriate job descriptions that have been reviewed recently. No provision has been made for the appraisal of the principals.
- 5.10 Policy-making is effective but the overall management systems are insufficiently thorough or robust to ensure consistent implementation. For example, the monitoring and tracking of students' progress is weak, which hinders informed target-setting for students. Furthermore, the development of ICT is restricted by a cross-curricular approach, in which there is no monitoring of provision so that students' development is uneven. Boarding provision also lacks careful monitoring.
- 5.11 In all sections of the college pastoral structures are highly effective in ensuring that students feel valued, safe and secure. Those in leadership positions act decisively when circumstances dictate. However, communication within and between different sections of the college and awareness of procedures are inconsistent at times. This is evidenced, for example, by differences in the quality of marking and teaching, and the absence of a clear protocol for formal meetings of departments.
- 5.12 Planning at all levels is currently insufficiently detailed. This is apparent within the outline college development plan. The plan accurately identifies all the major areas for development including significant changes in the accommodation from which the students will benefit. The document lacks the details, however, that would enable the proprietors to monitor progress and ensure that expected changes take place by agreed deadlines. The college is currently revising its development planning process to incorporate a greater focus on continuing professional development for staff, the tracking of ICT provision and ensuring that teachers have greater clarity over the specific needs of students with disabilities and those with special educational needs.
- 5.13 The college has good links with parents at all stages. Staff are easily accessible to parents and operate an open-door policy. The college uses email to contact parents without delay with any concerns that arise. Any concerns from parents are dealt with promptly. The college has an appropriate complaints procedure and deals with matters accordingly.
- 5.14 Whilst there is no parents' association, parents throughout the college are encouraged to support its activities and to maintain regular contact. A small number of parents in their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire commented that they were not encouraged to be involved in the life of the college. It was noted, however, that some parents do help with mock interviews and talk about their own jobs as part of the college's careers programme.
- 5.15 Parents of current and prospective students are provided with all the required information about the college, with all key documents easily accessible on the

website. Other useful information available on the website includes details of forthcoming events and arrangements, students' activities and sample menus.

- 5.16 Helpful information is provided for parents at key transitional points, for example prior to GCSE and when students move into the sixth form, and for parents of boarders. The newsletter, the RIC Times, provides parents and students with a regular update on events and key achievements. Parents receive regular feedback on their child's work and progress, both in person at the yearly parents' evenings and in the written reports sent home twice a term. These reports are of good quality and give useful information about progress made, with helpful targets for improvement.

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