



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INTEGRATED INSPECTION

COMBE BANK SCHOOL

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Combe Bank School

Full Name of School	Combe Bank School
DfE Number	886/6018
Registered Charity Number	1007871
Address	Combe Bank School Combe Bank Drive Sundridge Kent TN14 6AE
Telephone Number	01959 563720
Fax Number	01959 561997
Email Address	enquiries@combebank.co.uk
Headmistress	Mrs Julie Tricks
Chair of Governors	Mr Peter Dickinson
Age Range	3 to 18
Total Number of Pupils	238
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (20 boys; 218 girls)
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS): 0 5-11: 56 3-5 (EYFS): 46 11-18: 136
Head of EYFS Setting	Miss McCormack
EYFS Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	10 to 13 Feb 2015

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in February 2009.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. The range of these Regulations can be viewed on the website www.legislation.gov.uk. Additionally, inspections will consider the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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

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

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

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

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgements.

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', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.**

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited 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 Richard Mannix	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Caroline Bateson	Team Inspector (Head, GSA school)
Ms Linda Glithro	Team Inspector (Formerly Deputy Head, GSA school)
Mr Andrew Selkirk	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, Society of Heads school)
Miss Mary Regan	Co-ordinating Inspector for Early Years

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL.

- 1.1 Combe Bank School in Kent was founded in 1924 by the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, housed in a Grade 1 listed Palladian mansion originally built for the Duke of Argyll. The school was re-founded in 1973 as an independent day school for girls. The school retains a strong Christian ethos, although it welcomes pupils of all faiths or none, and entry is from the term in which pupils are aged three, until eighteen. The senior school is housed within the main building, and the prep school and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are housed in a redeveloped stable block area. The 27-acre school grounds contain landscaped gardens and sports facilities, including a purpose-built sports centre. The school is owned by the Combe Bank Educational Trust. The school is managed by governors, who make up the management council.
- 1.2 The school aims to develop pupils' talents and gifts and to challenge pupils to achieve academic excellence and personal success within a community based on Christian principles. Since the previous inspection the school has begun making the transition from an all-girls school, to fully co-educational status. Since September 2014 boys have been accepted into Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes, and in the sixth form. From September 2015 boys will be accepted into Year 7 of the senior school. The school has a new headmistress, in post since January 2015.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection there were 238 pupils on the roll, 102 in the prep school, including 46 pupils in the EYFS for pupils aged three to five, including 18 boys and 28 girls. Twenty-two EYFS pupils attend part-time. One hundred and thirty-six pupils attend the senior school, including thirty-six attending the sixth form, two of whom are boys. The majority of pupils come from the Sevenoaks, Oxted, Hayes and Tonbridge areas, and come from predominantly professional backgrounds. A school transport system covers a number of local towns, including Tonbridge and Caterham.
- 1.4 The ability profiles of the prep and senior schools are above the national average, with most pupils having ability in line with or above the national average. The ability profile of the sixth form is below the national average, with most pupils having ability in line with or below the national average. At the time of the inspection there were five pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), none of whom receive specialist support. The school identifies 17 pupils in the senior school and 11 pupils in the prep school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), all of whom receive special educational provision. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs or an educational health and care (EHC) plan.
- 1.5 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 The quality of pupils' achievements in academic and extra-curricular activities is excellent. In the EYFS, most children reach expected levels of achievement and the more able pupils exceed expectations in many areas of their learning and development. In both the prep and senior schools, pupils are articulate and confident in expressing their views and listen well to the views of others. In the prep school, the secure literacy and numeracy skills acquired by pupils provide a strong foundation for their future progress. In the senior school, pupils achieve success in public examinations at GCSE and A level and achieve outstanding success in the creative subjects, including in music, drama and art and design. Pupils are encouraged to think critically, are well motivated and demonstrate very effective independent learning skills. Pupils show initiative from an early age and develop their learning through recognising their own strengths and limitations. Pupils' success in extra-curricular activities, in both the senior and prep schools, in gymnastics, swimming and choral work, is exceptional and a strength of the school. Specialist teaching in the prep school aids the transition to the senior school and excellent teaching meets the needs of pupils of all abilities, but the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the classroom is not yet developed fully.
- 2.2 The quality of pupils' personal development is excellent and a further strength of the school. At every age pupils benefit from close supportive relationships with each other and with the staff. Pupils value kindness and good manners and the standards of behaviour are exceptionally good. Pupils relish the chance to reflect and learn from the world around them and to accept responsibility. The tolerant and transparent community very much encourages pupils to think of others before themselves and to feel at ease expressing their views and conveying their concerns. A few pupils in responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that they were not being asked for their opinions. However, no evidence was seen to support this concern, and the inspection showed the school made excellent efforts to invite pupils to put their views forward. The arrangements for welfare, health and safety are good. In the past, although the required recruitment checks were carried out and recorded, this was not always in a sufficiently timely manner.
- 2.3 The quality of governance from the management council is good, with many excellent aspects throughout the school. The council members know the school well and exercise careful financial and educational management to meet those needs which are priorities. The council's planning, and close consultation with a new and very effective senior management team, has enabled the school to develop with a strong cohesive vision. An overwhelming majority of the parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire considered that the school was well led and managed and their children were safe. The council's oversight of regulatory policies has not always been thorough, since in the past, policies and practices have not always been updated sufficiently quickly. By the start of the inspection, the school had taken appropriate steps to update policy and practice where required. All recommendations from the previous report have been addressed.
- 2.4 The school is in the process of changing into a fully co-educational school and boys are already accepted into the prep school and sixth form. Good management planning has ensured that this has been a positive transition. Accepting boys into

the senior school in Year 7 from September 2015 will be the final stage in the process.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

2.5 The school does not meet all the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and therefore it is required to:

- ensure that all required checks on the suitability of staff, including, in the event of the DBS disclosure being delayed, separate barred list checks, are made before they start work at the school [Part 4 paragraphs 18(3) under Suitability of staff and proprietors; and, for the same reason, Part 3, paragraphs 7.(a) and (b), under Welfare, health and safety].

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

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

1. Exercise greater rigour in the oversight of policies to ensure that the most recent regulatory requirements are observed.
2. Expand and integrate the use of ICT in the classroom to support more fully the teaching and learning.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' achievement and learning is excellent.
- 3.2 The school more than fulfils its aim to ensure that all pupils are inspired to develop their talents and gifts. Pupils' level of personal success, as well as academic success in relation to their abilities, is excellent.
- 3.3 Pupils, both in the prep and senior school, are highly articulate and thrive on opportunities to express their ideas and opinions. Pupils in all year groups listen to one another, are sensitive to others' views, share ideas with evident respect, discuss concepts eloquently and ask perceptive questions. Pupils' skills in reading, writing and numeracy are well developed relative to ages and ability, and these skills underpin the excellent levels of achievement. Pupils' skills in design and creativity are particularly well developed in the senior school, with excellent techniques shown across a wide variety of media, including photography, art and textiles.
- 3.4 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2011 to 2013. These are the most recent three years for which comparable statistics are currently available. Results in GCSE have been above the national average for girls in maintained schools. The A-level results have been similar to the national average for girls in maintained schools. Steady improvement has been achieved in GCSE and A-level results in both 2013 and 2014.
- 3.5 In the EYFS, children make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and capabilities and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. National progress data for the prep school indicates that pupils make at least appropriate progress, and in some cohorts good progress, in relation to the average for pupils of similar ability. GCSE and A-level progress in the senior school and sixth form is good in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. During the inspection, inspectors' observation of teaching, scrutiny of pupils' written work and interviews with pupils about their work found the progress they made throughout the school to be excellent in relation to their abilities.
- 3.6 Pupils often achieve exceptionally high standards across a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils achieved excellent success in the UK Maths Challenge and music and drama are strengths of the school, with outstanding performances in concerts, plays and in both solo and choral singing. Sport is another strength of the school, with pupils winning many individual and team competitions against many larger schools in swimming, athletics, netball and gymnastics and this success was repeated in many national competitions. Many pupils achieve success in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DoE).
- 3.7 In the EYFS, more able pupils exceed expectations in many areas of their learning and development. As they progress through the school more able pupils continue to benefit from challenging teaching, and those with individual talents are strongly encouraged to reach the highest levels of achievement in their own areas of expertise.
- 3.8 Pupils with SEND make rapid progress as a result of excellent support and have full access to the curricular and the extra-curricular experiences on offer. EAL pupils

are appropriately supported in the classroom and are encouraged to make good progress.

- 3.9 In the EYFS, children are active learners who are enthusiastic and extremely confident about new learning experiences, which they enjoy. Throughout the school, pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive and pupils are encouraged to develop their learning by recognising their own strengths and limitations. Pupils are very well motivated, take pride in their work and show very effective independent learning skills, often showing initiative from an early age. They enjoy working in groups and are happy to listen and support each other, successfully promoting each other's progress and learning. Pupils' co-operative and positive attitudes encourage excellent behaviour; this helps them to settle well in class and listen attentively to the teaching. In 2014 all sixth-form leavers gained places at their first choice of university, including many going to universities with a high standard of entry.

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

- 3.10 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.11 The curriculum supports the school's aims to provide challenges in learning and opportunities for personal endeavour. Pre-inspection parental responses indicated an overwhelming majority of the parents judge that pupils are offered a wide range of subjects and that very able pupils receive appropriate support. Evidence during the inspection showed that the excellent curricular provision encouraged pupils to develop high expectations in their approach to school life. The previous inspection report recommended that the school developed the provision for those pupils with SEND in the senior school. Learning support provision, with a recently appointed head of learning support, very effectively helps pupils to access the curriculum by working closely with teaching staff to provide bespoke learning programmes to ensure excellent progress. The few EAL pupils are appropriately provided for and well integrated.
- 3.12 Throughout the school the curriculum is broad, balanced and wholly suited to the ages and needs of all pupils. In the EYFS, the educational programmes offered are extremely well planned and the children benefit from excellent facilities. For all years, the curriculum is appropriately evaluated to ensure effective provision is maintained, and this approach is helping the school's move to full co-educational status. Recent developments in the curriculum include the introduction of Spanish in Year 7, geography becoming a core subject and enhancing the provision for the English Baccalaureate. Religious education (RE) is compulsory up to GCSE and the high level of moral and ethical awareness developed is fundamental to the Christian ethos of the school. The comprehensive personal, social, health education and citizenship (PSHEC) curriculum includes British values and very successfully prepares pupils for life in British society.
- 3.13 The curriculum for sixth-form pupils is adapted and developed so that every pupil takes subjects suitable to their abilities and career aspirations, including many recently introduced subjects, such as A levels in photography, sports studies and media studies, and BTECs in musical theatre and physical education (PE). More academically able pupils have very good opportunities to enjoy being challenged and using their well-developed independent learning skills. ICT provision has been improved recently, but does not yet fully support teaching and learning.

- 3.14 Curricular planning across transition stages is excellent. In the prep school, almost all pupils achieve the secondary school of their choice. In the senior school and sixth form, pupils feel constructively supported by the very helpful careers advice provided.
- 3.15 An excellent range of extra-curricular activities is on offer, and an overwhelming majority of the parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaires agreed. It is within this extra-curricular provision that the school develops notable excellence, for instance in music, arts and sport. Excellent sports facilities enable all pupils to benefit from a comprehensive PE and games programme. Regular drama productions take place at all ages and the school ensures that every pupil who wishes to take part is included. Almost all pupils undertake the DoE bronze award with the opportunity to progress onto the silver and gold awards. Numerous educational trips and visits, including many residential ones, greatly enrich pupils' learning and personal development.
- 3.16 Links with the local community add very significantly to pupils' personal development. A wide variety of charity events occur throughout the year and pupils are very keen to help the local community. Pupils in Year 11, who regularly attend mornings at a local school for disabled children, describe these visits as deeply rewarding and great fun.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.17 The contribution of teaching is excellent.
- 3.18 Excellent teaching is effective in promoting pupils' strong progress and supports fully the aims of the school. Enthusiastic and passionate teaching enables pupils of all ages and abilities to enjoy their work, to be motivated and to achieve success. The majority of the parents and pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed with this view.
- 3.19 A large majority of teaching observed was excellent and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In the senior and prep school, teaching is well planned and reflects an accurate understanding of individual needs and abilities of pupils, including those with SEND. In the prep school, including in the EYFS, the early introduction of specialist teaching greatly aids the pupils' learning experience and supports fully transition within the prep school, and on to the senior school
- 3.20 In all year groups teachers know their pupils very well and relationships between pupils and staff are very positive and trusting. In the EYFS, teaching shows a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated learning. Strategies to promote independent and critical thinking in teaching are plentiful and more able pupils are offered a wide variety of differentiated and challenging tasks and pupils with EAL are appropriately supported.
- 3.21 The process for assessment is very well developed throughout the school. Marking is of a very good and consistent standard and formative comments are used constructively, allowing pupils to respond and progress rapidly. Excellent oral feedback is an important element of the assessment process. Pupils have a genuine sense of participation in their own learning and the personal learning checklists, which pupils contribute to themselves, are widely used to excellent effect throughout the school.

- 3.22 In the EYFS, staff have high expectations and use thorough assessment data to plan exciting learning activities. In the prep school as a whole, the effective use of standardised data, including a very informative grading and reporting system, allows teachers to monitor and respond well to pupils' needs. The creation of the new director of studies post in the prep school is facilitating the drive to embed assessment and tracking in the junior years. Throughout the school, the recently introduced personal intervention plans (PIPs) are providing a very constructive method of enhancing teaching and learning, including the setting of individually agreed targets, with an indication of the appropriate support. Pupils are clear about how to progress and greatly benefit from this awareness. Pupils value the opportunity to have a strong input into their own PIP.
- 3.23 Teachers' subject knowledge is very strong. They are well qualified and secure in understanding their own subject's requirements. In class pupils are exposed to a wide variety of teaching techniques and styles, which promotes pupils' motivation and interest, enabling much excellent learning and progress to be made. Regular 'teaching and learning' meetings and checks on the scrutiny of pupils' work enable the staff to focus on developing teaching 'excellence'. This approach has contributed greatly to improving outcomes for pupils.
- 3.24 The teaching challenges pupils, including the more able. The brisk pace and high expectations of the teachers contribute significantly to pupils' sustained learning and their excellent behaviour. The teaching uses a wide variety of approaches and resources to stimulate pupils' learning successfully, but the overuse of textbooks and worksheets as the predominant resource was occasionally in evidence. Some teaching makes effective use of interactive whiteboards, but the use of these is less well developed. Homework is used very constructively and a majority of pre-inspection questionnaire responses indicated that pupils and parents agreed. Educational visits and trips abroad enrich the teaching, and pupils greatly appreciate the extra support teachers willingly provide outside lesson time.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 The school is highly successful in providing a happy and purposeful learning environment in line with the aims of the school, based on Christian principles and respect for others.
- 4.3 The spiritual development of pupils is excellent. Whilst the school embraces all faiths, a strong Christian ethos underpins school life. Thoughtful and motivational assembly programmes in both schools are appreciated by pupils. During the inspection week inspirational singing of '*Pie Jesu*', by senior pupils, was appreciated fully by the whole senior school. Pupils are encouraged to reflect and learn from the world around them. The school buildings and grounds are enormously cherished by pupils, who speak with great affection about the splendour of the library and their enjoyment of walking in the grounds.
- 4.4 The moral development of pupils is excellent. Pupils in all year groups have a keen sense of right and wrong and understand the need for rules. School councils in the prep and senior schools have produced appropriate versions of the 'School Code of Conduct', which are displayed around the school and followed assiduously by pupils. Much of the teaching encourages pupils to develop their moral and ethical understanding. They feel very confident in expressing their own views and learning from the views of others. Pupils have a strong awareness of the needs of others, and considerable sums are enthusiastically raised for charities and for those less fortunate than themselves.
- 4.5 The social development of pupils is excellent. In the EYFS, children show great respect for each other and they co-operate, take turns and share very well. Throughout the school, staff value kindness and good manners extremely highly and lead by example. As a result, pupils exhibit these qualities and their behaviour towards one another and towards adults is polite, caring and friendly. The house system greatly contributes to a strong sense of community. The PSHE and citizenship curriculum develops pupils' understanding of British laws and institutions, and British values are actively embraced.
- 4.6 In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses a majority of pupils stated that they were given the chance to take on responsibility. Inspectors found that pupils readily accept positions of responsibility and that there are many leadership opportunities throughout the school. Year 6 pupils take turns to act as 'Busy Bees', and can be asked to do jobs to support their community. Senior school pupils help to run prep school extra-curricular clubs and they can complete the service element of their DoE award in this way. In the pre-inspection questionnaire responses an overwhelming majority of pupils felt encouraged to show initiative and to work independently.
- 4.7 Pupils' cultural development is excellent. The harmonious multicultural and multi-faith school community ensures that pupils understand and respect other faiths and cultures. Tolerance and interest in other cultures and traditions are actively promoted through teaching and activities. Pupils are introduced to world faiths in RE and develop an appreciation of the beliefs of others during visits to the local mosque, synagogue and churches. Senior school pupils experience and learn to appreciate other cultures at first hand through a plentiful number of overseas trips.

- 4.8 In the EYFS, the children are well prepared for transition within the setting or into school. On leaving the prep and senior school, pupils have an excellent standard of personal development in preparation for the next stage of their lives.

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

- 4.9 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.10 The school meets fully its aim to be a community based on Christian principles and respect for others. There is a coherent and well-structured system of pastoral care in place throughout the prep and senior schools. All pupils are included and looked after with care and compassion. House activities play a large part in reinforcing a sense of community and identity.
- 4.11 In interviews and in responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, pupils and parents consistently considered the school a happy, safe environment and to achieve high standards of behaviour. Staff are trusted by the pupils and are excellent role models. Relationships between pupils and staff, and amongst pupils, are excellent and this is a very evident strength of the school. Staff know their pupils well and are very responsive to their needs. In the EYFS, each child has a key person to ensure that their needs are met, and the children feel very safe. Pupils in interviews gave many examples of individual support offered with work and personal issues, by both staff and other pupils. Excellent opportunities are available for senior school pupils to support younger pupils in the prep school in activities, such as dance and swimming.
- 4.12 Throughout the school healthy eating is taught within the curriculum. School lunches are freshly prepared and nutritious, and include a range of healthy options and choices. In responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire and in interviews pupils indicated strong satisfaction with the food. They greatly appreciated the freedom of choice and the facility to return for more. In the EYFS, and across all years, there are many opportunities for physical development across a wide range of well-resourced sports facilities.
- 4.13 Good behaviour is well sustained by a clear system of rewards and sanctions. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, a few pupils claimed that teachers were not fair in the way sanctions and rewards were given. Inspection evidence showed the rewards and sanctions are closely monitored and applied very fairly. Pupils interviewed expressed very positive views about the system and its implementation. Pupils feel strong ownership of the school's guidelines on good behaviour and understand fully, and support, the school's high expectations. The school has rigorous measures to guard against bullying. There is particularly strong monitoring and oversight of the bullying policy. Records are carefully kept and, if required, prompt and helpful action is taken. Annually, there is a bullying survey held in the senior school and a week of anti-bullying activities in the prep school. Pupils in interviews commented very favourably on the low incidence of bullying, and had every confidence it would be quickly dealt with if it were to arise.
- 4.14 A small minority of pupils, in their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, felt that their opinions were not asked for, or responded to. Inspection evidence showed that the school is very effective in seeking pupils' views. Pupils confidently put forward items to be discussed at the school council. Senior pupils make use of a 'worry box' to raise issues, and a similar system is in place in the prep school. Pupils spoke

highly of its use, and felt suggestions were acted upon promptly by the headmistress, in a very supportive manner.

- 4.15 The school has suitable policies and procedures in place to ensure continued improvement in educational access for those pupils with SEND.

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

- 4.16 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is good.
- 4.17 The school's arrangements for safeguarding its pupils are, for the most part, excellent. Pupils in all age groups feel safe in the school and pupils' welfare is promoted very effectively. Comprehensive and informative policies on safeguarding are implemented robustly. Records of concerns about pupils' welfare are stored, monitored and action taken. Suitably trained, designated staff freely seek advice from external agencies when appropriate. All staff receive regular and highly effective safeguarding training, including internet safety awareness and this training is updated, evaluated and monitored. Records of complaints and bullying are logged and monitored, and appropriate, timely responses are correctly recorded.
- 4.18 Very thorough measures are implemented to minimise the risk from fire and other hazards. Comprehensive risk assessments are appropriately implemented to excellent effect and, in the event of fire, the correct procedures are well known by the staff and pupils. The first aid policy is effectively implemented and provision for ill and injured pupils and those with SEND is effective. A suitable number of staff are trained in first aid and a high proportion of these staff are trained in paediatric first aid.
- 4.19 In the past, some policies had not been updated in a timely manner to reflect the most recent requirements, but all had been amended prior to the inspection. Although all recruitment checks were undertaken and recorded appropriately, in the past, some of the required recruitment checks had not been completed by the time the member of staff started work. The school has now amended its procedures.
- 4.20 Admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and correctly stored.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is good.
- 5.2 The governing body, or management council, is very successful in ensuring that the aims of the school are fulfilled. These aims, and a clear Christian ethos, inform the council's decisions, particularly when formulating the school development plan and prioritising financial support for improving the educational provision and standards for pupils. Throughout the school very careful financial planning, and astute investment in staff and accommodation and resources, enables the council to discharge its responsibilities fully, and provide an excellent education for pupils in its care.
- 5.3 Members of the council have well-defined, specific areas of responsibility and work very closely with the senior management, providing support, challenge and stimulus, for the school's continued growth and improvement. The council has a well-informed vision for the school and this helps ensure the strategic committees are very effective. The council is very keen to be a 'critical friend' for the new headmistress, whilst providing fulsome support for her new initiatives.
- 5.4 The council places due emphasis on discharging its safeguarding responsibilities. However, the council's oversight and annual review of policies have not been sufficiently effective; some policies had not been updated to reflect current regulations, although all were revised before the inspection. All necessary recruitment checks had been carried out and recorded, though not always in a timely manner.
- 5.5 The council is fully informed about the EYFS, and very effective in ensuring that the setting is well managed and supported in its educational development.

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

- 5.6 The quality of leadership and management are good.
- 5.7 Much is excellent, in accordance with the aims of the school; links with parents, carers and guardians are excellent.
- 5.8 In the EYFS, the leadership and management have ensured that the setting is welcoming, safe and stimulating and the supervision of staff is very effective. Great progress has been made since the previous inspection and the setting is well run with a clear vision for improvement priorities, including staff professional development. A recommendation in the previous report to develop the outdoor space has been met and it now provides a much improved and exciting learning environment.
- 5.9 Senior leadership provides a clear vision for the whole school, strongly focused on achieving the school's aims to develop pupils' talents and gifts and challenge pupils to achieve academic excellence and personal success, within a community based on Christian principles. Senior leadership is very effective in giving clear educational direction throughout the school. Staff and pupils understand and share this vision,

enabling the whole school to develop and make progress. Leadership and management are effective at all levels in the school. Excellent channels of communication create an open and supportive environment, which is appreciated by staff and pupils in the senior and prep schools. A recommendation of the last report, to draw up a long-term development plan, has been met and the school now has a clear and very constructive plan introduced by the governing council in full collaboration with the senior leadership. 'Away-days' for the governing council and senior leadership, where the school's progress is evaluated and targets for following years are identified, have greatly enhanced this collaboration. Recent changes to the senior leadership have made a strong contribution to the school's progress and development.

- 5.10 Senior leaders know the school extremely well. Regular meetings and discussions ensure that senior leadership is involved fully in all aspects of the school and that regular evaluation of the support and direction provided takes place. The school has planned carefully for the recent introduction of boys into the senior and prep school and has reviewed the curriculum, resources and provision of accommodation to facilitate a smooth transition. Academic middle management has confidence in the senior leadership, and heads of department play a significant role in maintaining high standards and providing excellent support for the pupils in their learning. Teaching and learning are integral to this planning. The quality of teaching is very well monitored, with teachers and pupils contributing to an annual review of subject departments' curricula and teaching at senior school level.
- 5.11 The school is successful in recruiting high-quality staff at all levels, and the school has a well-established and clearly documented performance review system. All staff, including support staff, receive comprehensive training in safeguarding and welfare, health and safety. There is a rigorous induction programme for all new staff and there are checks to ensure that all staff attend this training. Prior to the inspection, oversight of policies had not been sufficiently robust to take account of new legislation. This was remedied prior to the inspection visit. In the past, although recruitment checks had been completed and recorded appropriately, these checks were not always completed before staff began work at the school. Prior to the inspection, the school strengthened management procedures in this area.
- 5.12 The quality of links with parents is excellent. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, from across all sections of the school, were happy with the education and support provided for their children. A representative sample of parents who met with inspectors during the week spoke highly of a committed, dedicated staff; the schools' ethos; the care and the support provided for pupils and their families. The school has established a strong partnership with parents and deals promptly with concerns raised, in accordance with its published procedure. A suitable complaints policy is in place.
- 5.13 Parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire overwhelmingly felt that the school was well led and managed and that the school responded appropriately to their questions and concerns.
- 5.14 The school is very keen to work closely with parents and provides numerous opportunities for them to be actively involved in the life of the school, as well as the work and progress of pupils. This was observed during the inspection, when pre-half term gymnastic displays and competitions, in both the senior and prep schools, had very good parental support.

- 5.15 In the preparatory school parents are invited to class assemblies, concerts, swimming galas and many sporting events. There is the Mothers' Day tea and grandparents' tea. Parents are invited to accompany pupils on trips and visits. They freely volunteer to help with after-school clubs, at sporting events and swimming galas and parents are happy to present specialist workshops. Each class sends home regular electronic newsletters to share news about their work and forthcoming events with parents. The summer celebration is a good opportunity for parents to see the school in action, to go on a tour of the classrooms and specialist facilities, to enjoy refreshments and to watch pupils perform around the maypole.
- 5.16 In the senior school, parents are invited to numerous information evenings, including meeting with form tutors in the autumn term, pre-options choice meetings for GCSE and A Level and plentiful meetings regarding the university admissions process. Parents are invited to attend parenting workshops which cover topics such as, internet safety. There are concerts and choral society performances, an annual drama production and a fashion show showcasing GCSE and A-level textiles, photography and art. Sports fixtures and match teas have good parental support.
- 5.17 Parents of current and prospective pupils are provided with the required information about the school from parents' evenings; detailed and informative termly written reports; interim progress and grade cards; and regular electronic communication. A useful website, providing access to school policy documents and an annual school magazine, is much appreciated by the parents.
- 5.18 The parent teacher group, including parent representatives from across the whole school, is very strong and supports the school. It organises fundraising events and popular social events for the whole family, such as an annual firework display and barbecue. The preparatory school regularly holds meetings with parents representing each year group, to discuss school initiatives and projects, and parents receive regular updates on forthcoming events.

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