



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION
BEDFORD GIRLS' SCHOOL**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Bedford Girls' School

Full Name of School	Bedford Girls' School
DfE Number	822/6012
Registered Charity Number	1066861
Address	Bedford Girls' School Cardington Road Bedford Bedfordshire MK42 0BX
Telephone Number	01234 361900
Fax Number	01234 344125
Email Address	information@bedfordgirlsschool.co.uk
Headmistress	Miss Jo MacKenzie
Chair of Governors	Ms Tina Beddoes
Age Range	7 to 18
Total Number of Pupils	951
Gender of Pupils	Girls
Numbers by Age	7-11: 254 11-18: 697
Inspection Dates	17 to 20 March 2015

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. This is the first ISI inspection for this new school formed out of the merger of two pre-existing schools.

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.

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.

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
Mr Stephen Crump	Team Inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mrs Pamela Evans	Team Inspector (Former Head of Department, GSA school)
Ms Linda Glithro	Team Inspector (Former Deputy Head, GSA school)
Ms Susan La Farge	Team Inspector (Headmistress, ISA school)
Mrs Emma Margrett	Team Inspector (Director of Studies, ISA school)
Mr John Parsonage	Team Inspector (Former Head of Department, HMC school)
Mr Stephen Pugh	Team Inspector (Senior Deputy Head, HMC school)
Mr Matt Williams	Team Inspector (Assistant Head, GSA school)
Mr Ian Yorston	Team Inspector (Head of Department, HMC school)

CONTENTS

	Page
1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL	1
2 THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL	2
(a) Main findings	2
(b) Action points	3
(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements	3
(ii) Recommendations for further improvement	3
3 THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS	4
(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning	4
(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)	5
(c) The contribution of teaching	6
4 THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	8
(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils	8
(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care	9
(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety	10
5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	11
(a) The quality of governance	11
(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians	11

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Bedford Girls' School is an independent day school for girls aged seven to eighteen. It was formed through the merger of two separate Harpur Trust schools: Dame Alice Harpur School and Bedford High School for Girls. The new junior school, for pupils between the ages of seven and eleven, opened in 2010, the senior school, for pupils aged eleven to sixteen, in 2011 and finally the sixth form in 2012. The new school occupies the buildings of the former Dame Alice Harpur School, and is situated on the banks of the Great Ouse, to the south of Bedford town centre. Both of the schools that merged were originally founded in 1882 by the Harpur Trust Group, which was originally endowed by Sir William Harpur in 1556. Bedford Girls' School is owned and managed by the Harpur Trust (formerly the Bedford Trust). The Harpur Trust retains overall responsibility for the school, with everyday oversight the responsibility of the school committee of governors.
- 1.2 The school aims to challenge pupils to achieve their personal best, through imaginative and reflective practice. It places emphasis on participation within a safe environment where girls are encouraged to be bold, resilient and confident. The two founding schools have had previous inspection reports; this is Bedford Girls' School's first inspection.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection there were 951 pupils on the roll, of whom 254 were in the junior school. A total of 697 pupils attended the senior school, including 200 in the sixth form. The majority of pupils come from the Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire areas, and are from predominantly professional backgrounds. A large majority of pupils are of white British origin. A school transport system covers a number of local towns, including Milton Keynes, Luton and Biggleswade.
- 1.4 The school does not use standardised measures of ability for junior pupils. The ability profile of the senior school is above the national average. The ability profile of the sixth form is above the national average, although with a wider spread of abilities than in the senior school. At the time of the inspection there were no pupils who spoke English as an additional language. The school identifies twenty-four senior pupils and three junior pupils 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 education, 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 and learning is good. As a new school, comparative results are not available for the past three years; however, the results in 2013, taken together with inspection evidence, indicate that the pupils' achievement is good, with some reaching very high levels of attainment. Progress is good across the school, with good support for pupils with SEND and for able, gifted and talented pupils. The best teaching enables independent and challenging learning in most areas of the senior school, although this is less well developed at other ages and across some areas of the curriculum. Marking of work is regular and helpful, although in some departments there is limited use of informative comments to indicate ways to improve. Achievement in a wide range of sporting, creative and performance extra-curricular activities is excellent, and in some areas it is outstanding. Many pupils participate successfully in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme. Pupils throughout the school, including the sixth form, experience a broad and balanced curriculum, and have excellent learning attitudes; they listen well, participate actively and enjoy collaborative working.
- 2.2 Highly effective pastoral care ensures that pupils throughout the school have excellent standards of personal development. They benefit from close and supportive relationships, both with each other and with the staff. Pupils are friendly, courteous and very well behaved, and they show great respect and concern for others, including those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils have a keen sense of right and wrong, and their moral development is strong. Their social awareness is excellent and the school community shows great respect for other faiths and cultures. Provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is excellent, creating a safe environment for pupils. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a very large majority of pupils said that they like being at the school. A minority of pupils felt that the school does not ask for or respond to their opinions, and a very small minority of pupils showed concern over the amount of homework set and whether it helps them to learn. A wide range of evidence, including pupil interviews, showed that the school very actively seeks the pupils' opinions and responds favourably in many cases. Evidence indicated that the amount of homework is appropriate and helps pupils to learn, although there is some inconsistency across departments.
- 2.3 The senior leadership team with the support of governors and staff has enabled the school to make very effective progress over a relatively short period of time. A clear ethos and sense of purpose are evident throughout; the pupils already have a strong understanding of the school's aims and are very proud of their school. Middle leaders have contributed well to this successful development, although monitoring and evaluation of performance and outcomes are not yet consistently applied to the many initiatives across the school. Bold new initiatives in information and communication technology (ICT) provision are at an early stage of development, although much success has been achieved in supporting pupils' learning and achievement. Governors' oversight of policies and implementation of safeguarding requirements is rigorous and effective. The school has formed an excellent partnership with parents.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Ensure that implementation of the school's many new objectives is effectively monitored and developed.
2. Ensure that teaching enables more consistent opportunity for intellectual challenge in lessons.
3. Ensure that current good practice in both teaching and marking is developed across all areas of the school.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning is good.
- 3.2 Pupils are well educated in line with the school's aims. They demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge and understanding, and display excellent literacy skills. Pupils write accurately and develop coherent and often sophisticated arguments in their essays. Throughout the school they are articulate, and have strong listening and reading skills. Creativity is developed to a good standard through music, art, dance and drama. Pupils show good mathematical ability, illustrated by their successes in national competitions.
- 3.3 The following analysis uses the national data for 2013, the only year for which comparative statistics are currently available. Results at GCSE and A level were above the national average for pupils in maintained schools and similar to the national average for pupils in maintained selective schools. The results at both GCSE and A level improved in 2014. In the senior school, inspection evidence also indicates that the pupils' attainment is good, with many pupils achieving a high level. In the junior school pupils' attainment, based on inspection evidence, is in line with their abilities.
- 3.4 When account is taken of inspection evidence of the quality of teaching and of pupils' performance in lessons, and of the standardised measures of progress used by the school, levels of attainment in the senior school indicate that pupils make progress that is good in relation to the average for pupils of similar ability. In the junior school, although there is no external standardised testing, inspection evidence indicates that pupils make progress at least in line with their ability. Pupils with SEND are supported well and make good progress in line with their peers. The able, gifted and talented make good progress, enjoying success in areas such as a mathematics challenge and debating, although the use of extension tasks within teaching is limited in some departments. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire a very large majority of the parents felt that their children are making good progress, a view similarly shared by the pupils. Most Year 13 leavers gain places at competitive institutions of higher education.
- 3.5 Pupils' achievement in sporting and other extra-curricular activities is excellent, with much that is outstanding. They are successful at national, regional and county levels in a wide range of sports, notably hockey, water polo, tennis and football. They achieve well in music, dance and drama, regularly achieving success in local competitions and many participating successfully in the DofE scheme.
- 3.6 Throughout the school pupils display strong reasoning ability, as well as effective independent research and thinking skills, which are fostered particularly through the International Baccalaureate (IB) courses and the Extended Project Qualification. Alongside the new enhanced curriculum in the junior school, 'question, explore and discover' (QED) extended homework is effectively developing the pupils' independent learning. Pupils are confident users of ICT, and some productive use of tablet computers was observed in teaching.
- 3.7 Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are excellent throughout the school. In lessons they settle to work quickly, show excellent behaviour, listen attentively and maintain their concentration well. Pupils participate actively, asking questions and

contributing freely to discussions. They take responsibility for their own learning, making very well-presented notes and undertaking a good level of independent study. Pupils collaborate effectively in group and pair work, which is particularly evident in the junior school, and they benefit from opportunities to comment on each other's work. Pupils enjoy their studies and derive great satisfaction from their many and varied successes.

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

- 3.8 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.9 The high standard of provision is fully in line with the aims of the school in challenging pupils to achieve their personal best, through imaginative and reflective practice. Provision throughout the school is broad and very well balanced, covering the appropriate areas of learning and meeting the needs of all pupils. In responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire an overwhelming majority of parents agreed that their children are offered an appropriate range of subjects.
- 3.10 Previous inspection reports, prior to the merger, indicated that more attention should be given to challenging the able, gifted and talented. The recent appointment of a co-ordinator for challenge and extension and a number of new initiatives have ensured that monitoring and development of this aspect, particularly outside the classroom, are now good. Provision for pupils with SEND is excellent.
- 3.11 Developing ICT is a major school focus and pupils in most year groups have individual tablet computers to facilitate this; the school intends that all pupils will have tablet computers by September 2015. This new improved ICT facility is enhancing the pupils' learning in a number of departments. The comprehensive personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum includes active promotion of British values and very successfully prepares pupils for life in British society. The pupils experience a balanced presentation of opposing views in the coverage of political issues.
- 3.12 The junior school has recently adopted a new creative 'enhanced curriculum', with pupils following termly units of enquiry that seek to improve their learning skills. Subject specialist teaching, in dance, drama, music, sport and modern foreign languages, greatly enhances the pupils' learning. In Year 6, pupils begin studying three separate sciences in the senior school laboratories to strengthen links between the junior and senior schools and to provide more challenge for the pupils.
- 3.13 In the senior school, pupils in Years 7 and 8 follow a very wide range of subjects, including two modern foreign languages, classics and thinking skills. Pupils benefit from a physical education and games programme that provides excellent opportunities and specialist teaching in a wide range of sports. The resource centre in the senior school and the junior libraries are used very well to enhance pupils' learning. An excellent range of GCSEs and International GCSEs is offered, including three separate sciences. Pupils benefit greatly from a comprehensive PSHE programme that includes excellent careers advice. Both A-level and IB courses are offered in the sixth form, and great care is taken to ensure that pupils choose courses best suited to their abilities and career aspirations.
- 3.14 The provision of extra-curricular activities is extensive, greatly enhancing pupils' development, and their enjoyment of school life. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents and pupils indicated strong satisfaction with the range of extra-curricular activities. A strong Combined Cadet Force programme is co-

ordinated jointly with a local boys' school, and pupils are offered a wide range of dance activities and the well-supported DofE scheme. Pupils in the senior school regularly broadcast programmes from their own well-equipped radio station.

- 3.15 An extensive range of trips and visits enhances pupils' knowledge, interest and understanding. These include residential trips, such as the annual Year 5 visit to London and a recent trip to Costa Rica for senior pupils. Fund raising supports a wide variety of charities and is very much embedded in the ethos of the school. For example, pupils and staff recently participated in Race for Life, in support of a cancer charity. The wide range of links with the community includes regular support for a local school for children with physical disabilities, further enhancing the pupils' personal development.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.16 The contribution of teaching is good.
- 3.17 Teaching enables pupils to make good progress and supports the school's aim for them to become bold, imaginative and reflective. Much excellent teaching was observed, and teachers know their pupils very well, giving generously of their time to help individuals' learning through extra support outside the classroom. Pupils show a very positive attitude to their learning and the teachers' good classroom management encourages high standards in behaviour. Pupils are encouraged to work co-operatively to support each other's learning, and the frequent praise given enhances their confidence.
- 3.18 Assessment is used well to inform teachers' short- and medium-term planning. Teachers regularly share their teaching objectives with their classes to enable pupils to make good progress. In more effective lessons observed, such as a senior school English lesson that encouraged the pupils to respond to material with considerable imagination, the teaching showed good pace and used open-ended questioning to ensure that pupils were appropriately challenged and encouraged to be independent in their learning. In the less successful lessons observed, the teaching was more limiting and unexciting in its presentation.
- 3.19 Very well-qualified teachers have a strong knowledge of their subjects and this provides a firm basis for good teaching. Departmental resources are excellent, and in some departments their use is particularly effective in supporting pupils' learning. The introduction of tablet computers for pupils in lessons has had a positive effect on their progress and learning. Some departments make good use of both these and of interactive whiteboards, although this is not yet sufficiently developed across the school.
- 3.20 Work is marked regularly, and across the school there are good examples of constructive marking, using clear and fully understood success criteria to inform the pupils about how to improve and make further progress. There is a clear and helpful school marking policy. However, in some departments the use of informative comments is more limited and it is less clear how the pupils could improve.
- 3.21 The strong relationships which exist between staff and pupils provide excellent levels of communication, to ensure that all pupils feel supported fully in their learning. A very effective learning support department provides individual support for pupils with particular learning needs, including those with SEND, to ensure that they make good progress in relation to their abilities. In teaching, opportunities to develop higher level thinking skills for the able, gifted and talented pupils are inconsistent.

Across the school, teaching is very well balanced and non-partisan in its coverage of political issues. Teaching promotes tolerance and respect, and pupils are encouraged to question their values over a wide range of moral issues.

- 3.22 A small minority of pupils indicated in response to the pre-inspection questionnaire the view that they are not given the right amount of work and that homework does not help them to learn. A few parents also expressed their concern over homework. Inspection evidence showed that the amount of work set is appropriate, although some inconsistency was evident in a few year groups. In discussions with those in progressively older year groups, pupils increasingly spoke more positively about homework assisting in their learning, as its purpose becomes clearer.

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 the pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 The school is highly successful in meeting its aims to challenge pupils to achieve their personal best, through imaginative and reflective practice in a safe environment where strength, resilience and confidence are encouraged. Pupils indicate great loyalty towards, and great pride in, their school and the values it holds.
- 4.3 The spiritual development of pupils is excellent. Whilst the school embraces other faiths, a strong Christian ethos underpins school life. Pupils appreciate the thoughtful assembly programmes in both the junior and the senior schools, in which they are happy to take an active role. Their strong appreciation of non-material aspects of life is very evident in their enthusiastic participation in art, drama, music and sport. Pupils develop a strong sense of personal worth and self-esteem. They are reflective, emotionally mature and sensitive to the world around them.
- 4.4 The moral development of the pupils is excellent. Pupils in all year groups have a keen sense of right and wrong, and they understand the need for rules. School councils for both junior and senior pupils have actively promoted the school values of reflection, strength and imagination. This, and much of the teaching, enables pupils to develop their moral and ethical understanding. Pupils feel very confident in expressing their own views and learning from those of others, and they engage with ease in very worthwhile classroom discussions on moral and ethical issues. Pupils in all year groups have a strong awareness of the needs of others and considerable sums are raised for local, national and international charities.
- 4.5 The social development of pupils is excellent. Across the school pupils show great respect and concern for each other and value one another's individuality. Pupils are highly positive about the experience they receive on first joining the school. Staff value kindness and good manners extremely highly and lead by example. As a result, pupils reflect these qualities and their behaviour towards each other and towards adults is courteous, caring and friendly. The house system greatly contributes to a strong sense of community. The PSHE programme develops pupils' understanding of English laws and institutions, and British values such as democracy are actively embraced.
- 4.6 Inspection evidence showed that pupils readily apply for and accept leadership opportunities throughout the school, whether as junior school head pupils or, in the senior school, as members of the Student Council, the Eco Council or the Girls' Leadership Group (GLG). Senior school pupils help to run drop-in clinics for younger pupils, to listen to their concerns and to assist with their work. They freely help with extra-curricular activities, and sixth-form IB pupils can complete their service component in this way. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a very large majority of pupils agreed there are good opportunities to take on positions of responsibility.
- 4.7 Pupils' cultural development is excellent. The harmonious multi-cultural and multi-faith school community ensures that pupils respect other backgrounds. Tolerance and interest in other cultures and traditions are actively promoted through teaching and extra-curricular activities. Pupils are introduced to world faiths and beliefs in religious studies and they learn about music from other cultures. Pupils benefit from

a wide variety of opportunities to experience and appreciate other cultures first hand, through visits and overseas trips. These have included, for example, a trip for Years 8 and 9 to Valencia in Spain and a DofE trip to Morocco.

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

- 4.8 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.9 The school successfully fulfils its aim to nurture pupils to become bold, imaginative and reflective, in part through its well-planned PSHE and thinking skills programmes. Dedicated and supportive staff know their pupils well, and the relationships between pupils and staff, and amongst pupils, are extremely positive and relaxed. Pupils indicated during interviews that they are given excellent guidance throughout the school, and know to whom they can turn if they have a difficulty or concern. Further care is provided by medical staff, on-site counsellors and outside agencies, if required. The school has a very effective accessibility plan to increase provision for pupils with SEND.
- 4.10 The GLG provides excellent role models for the younger pupils and has instigated, and then led, several successful school initiatives, such as the recently introduced 'value awards'. A member of the GLG liaises with the junior school and ensures that the views of these pupils are represented. The house system strengthens pupils' relationships across the age range of the school and provides a strong focus for many competitions and activities.
- 4.11 Pupils have a wide range of opportunities for physical exercise in curricular and extra-curricular activities, and understand the importance of healthy eating and keeping fit. Many pupils indicated during interviews that they are very pleased with the lunchtime menu, and evidence during the inspection showed that the food is of excellent quality, with a wide variety of choice.
- 4.12 There is an effective rewards and sanctions system. Transgressions are dealt with through a 'restorative justice' system, which encourages pupils to take responsibility for their actions. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaires a very small minority of pupils and a few parents expressed concern about the school's handling of bullying. The scrutiny of records and interviews with pupils showed that the few incidents of bullying are carefully recorded and monitored, and appropriate action swiftly taken when required. In questionnaire responses, the vast majority of parents felt that their children are safe and well looked after. A very high proportion of pupils stated in their pre-inspection questionnaire responses that they like being at the school.
- 4.13 The school employs various methods to seek the views of pupils, including a recent 'student voice' initiative. In questionnaire responses a minority of pupils indicated that they felt the school does not listen to their opinions or respond to them. Inspection evidence shows that the school has suitable mechanisms to gather the pupils' views and interviews with pupils indicated they have received a favourable response to concerns which have been raised.

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

- 4.14 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is excellent.
- 4.15 Thorough safeguarding policies and procedures take due account of current guidance. Staff training in child protection is carried out regularly and forms part of the induction programme for new staff. The school liaises effectively with local agencies over safeguarding matters when appropriate. The staff recruitment policy is thoroughly implemented and all required checks are undertaken, with records carefully maintained. Advice on e-safety to pupils, staff and parents is excellent, with appropriate messages widely promoted around the school.
- 4.16 The school has effective measures to reduce the risk from hazards, including fire safety. The fire policy contains clear procedures and arrangements, covering the required areas, and regular checks of equipment, training and servicing are very carefully recorded. Fire drills take place at regular intervals, with records showing the school's success in ensuring that pupils are evacuated rapidly and safely from buildings. There is a detailed risk assessment policy, and an extensive number of thorough risk assessments, including for sporting and other outdoor activities and off-site visits, are undertaken.
- 4.17 The approach to health and safety throughout the school is rigorous and thorough. The health and safety policy makes appropriate provision for pupils who are ill or injured and for those with SEND, and it is carefully implemented. The well-equipped medical centre, operated by qualified medical staff, provides excellent care for pupils, and staff trained in first aid are readily available throughout the school.
- 4.18 The admission and attendance registers are accurately maintained and stored for the required period of time.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is excellent.
- 5.2 The governing body manages the school on behalf of the owners, the Harpur Trust. The governors' vision and work have ensured that the recent merger of two well-established schools, Dame Alice Harpur School and Bedford High School, has been managed positively and effectively. The new school's aims are clear and they inform the governors' decision making, particularly when formulating detailed and effective short- and long-term development plans to develop learning resources, accommodation and staff.
- 5.3 A well-constructed committee structure ensures that governors have effective oversight of the school. Able and committed governors discharge fully their responsibilities for educational standards, and ensure that the school provides an excellent education for the pupils in its care. Governors undertake training, much of it provided by the Harpur Trust, that equips them to fulfil their role as governors.
- 5.4 The governors have clearly defined, specific areas of responsibility, and the success of the new school is in no small part due to their close working relationship with the senior leadership team. Governance provides both challenging and constructive support for the headmistress and the SLT. Governors are frequent visitors to the school, exploring the daily experience for pupils, observing lessons and attending events. They receive reports on a wide range of aspects of the school, and they place a high importance on regularly evaluating their effectiveness in providing support and direction for the school.
- 5.5 The full governing body and its committees place due emphasis on discharging their responsibilities for the welfare, health, safety and safeguarding of pupils. Regulatory policies are regularly and thoroughly reviewed, including an annual review of safeguarding procedures by the whole board.

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

- 5.6 The quality of leadership and management is good.
- 5.7 The senior leadership team's approach has been particularly successful in conveying to staff, parents and pupils a vision of a new school, whose aim to develop confidence, imagination, reflection and resilience in its pupils is very clear. The development of the new school, effectively begun in 2012, after completing its staged formation from the merger of the two previous schools, posed a great number of challenges. Progress and development of the new school have been effectively steered by the senior leadership's direction and oversight, with the full support of the governors and staff. The ethos and values of the new school strongly encourage both respect for others and the role of democracy in decision making.
- 5.8 The leadership structure ensures that responsibility for key areas is clearly defined. In pursuit of continuous improvement, the school has an extensive strategic plan, although the range of new initiatives is such that priorities and criteria for success for some aspects are not sufficiently well defined. The senior leadership team, together

with governors, has created clear policies, including those regarding safeguarding, and their implementation and effectiveness are regularly monitored and evaluated. Concerns about pupils are handled and resolved quickly, and the standard of pupils' personal development is excellent.

- 5.9 Through 'learning walks' and focused lesson observations, the senior leadership team is effective in encouraging self-evaluation and target setting, which has improved the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. An ambitious programme to promote the best possible use of ICT for both teaching and learning has seen the recent introduction of tablet computers for most pupils and all staff, with the intention to extend this for all pupils in September 2015. This programme, running alongside existing digital resources, has seen some early successes, most notably offering better access to the internet and more effective tools for sharing curriculum materials. The programme is not yet fully established in teaching and learning across the school.
- 5.10 Middle management provides a more immediate oversight of academic, pastoral and extra-curricular departments, and implements pupils' progress and personal development reviews. Middle management staff, both pastoral and academic, have confidence in the senior leadership team; secure in the knowledge that their voices are heard. Most departments have improved their development planning and highlighted targets for success. In some departments, staff development has been highly effective, with the sharing of good practice and a deliberate focus on performance and academic outcomes, although such development is not consistent across departments.
- 5.11 Management links between the senior and junior schools, which includes teaching by senior school specialists, is effective. In the junior school, teaching by senior school specialists has proved effective as a catalyst for enquiry amongst younger pupils. The development of QED schemes for homework within the junior school has encouraged further reflection on approaches to homework in the senior school.
- 5.12 School leadership is successful in appointing staff of high quality, both teaching and non-teaching, and they are appropriately trained in matters relating to health and safety, welfare and safeguarding. Recruitment checks follow official guidance and are rigorously implemented. All necessary checks are completed before staff, governors and volunteers are employed. Job descriptions are clear, and a comprehensive framework for performance review and development planning promotes the personal development of the staff as they work to support the needs of the school. Non-teaching staff are integrated fully into the school community and feel valued. Management of the estate and its resources is sympathetic, responsive and highly efficient. Parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed great confidence in the leadership and management of the school.
- 5.13 The quality of links with parents is excellent. The school places a high value on its relationships with parents. A comprehensive information pack is provided to the parents of prospective pupils, containing guidance on school routines and procedures. Parents of pupils entering the school at key entry points are invited to information evenings. Although a very small minority of parents thought they could have greater involvement in the life and work of the school, inspectors judged that arrangements were appropriate. They found that a wide range of opportunities is available for parents to be involved in the life of the school, including an 'open house' day, talks, careers evenings, parent representation group meetings and lectures. The Parent Teacher Association organises an annual programme of

successful fund-raising and social events; recent examples include a school ball and Burns Night.

- 5.14 Parents of current and prospective pupils are provided with required information about the school and much more. They indicated in pre-inspection questionnaire responses a very high level of satisfaction with the information they receive about the school and its policies, saying that they would recommend this school to another parent. A large majority of parents were also satisfied with the way the school responded to their questions in a timely manner.
- 5.15 The recently upgraded website offers a good range of information to parents, including current news and details of school policies and procedures. Its parents' portal provides copies of contact information for parents and the extra-curricular programme of activities is available online. A range of publications, both digital and printed, provides parents with further sources of information about school life. These include the weekly digital newsletter *Edit* and a high quality magazine *The Muse*, published once a term. Parents of pupils in both the junior and senior schools receive half-termly letters and have access to informative blogs. The school has appropriate arrangements to deal with complaints. A very small minority of parents' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that their concerns were not always handled well enough. Inspectors examined the school's policies and practice in this area, and judge that complaints and other concerns raised with the school are effectively handled in a timely manner, in line with the published procedures. Communication is constructive and such matters are appropriately recorded and monitored.
- 5.16 In the pre-inspection questionnaires, a few parents said that they would like more information about their child's progress. Inspectors judge that the information provided is good. They found that a relatively new and developing online 'learning gateway' gives further information about an individual pupil's attainment and academic data. Parents have the opportunity to discuss academic progress and personal development with teachers annually in the senior school and twice yearly in the junior school. Once a year, detailed printed reports in subjects studied give parents an account of their children's progress, effort and attainment, and helpful guidance on ways to improve, and parents are invited to respond to the school with their thoughts.

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