



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INTEGRATED INSPECTION

THE FIRS SCHOOL

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The Firs School

Full Name of School	The Firs School
DfE Number	896/6004
Address	The Firs School 45 Newton Lane Upton Chester Cheshire CH2 2HJ
Telephone Number	01244 322443
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Email Address	admin@firsschool.org
Headteacher	Mrs Lucy Davies
Proprietors	Firs Education Ltd
Age Range	3 to 11
Total Number of Pupils	172
Gender of Pupils	Boys and Girls (98 boys; 74 girls)
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS): 41 5-11: 131
EYFS Gender	Boys and Girls
Inspection Dates	01 Mar 2016 to 04 Mar 2016

PREFACE

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.

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*. The inspection on which the report is based took place over a period of four continuous days in the school.

The previous ISI standard inspection was in February 2010.

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 children aged under two), 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 school's directors, 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 Keith Morrow	Reporting Inspector
Mr Nicholas Vernon	Team Inspector (Head of Junior School, HMC school)
Mrs Geraldine Yandell	Team Inspector (Head of Junior School, ISA school)
Miss Jacqueline Scotney	Co-ordinating Inspector for Early Years

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 The Firs School is an independent, co-educational day school for pupils from the ages of 3 to 11. The school is situated in a residential area of Chester, serving both the city and wider surrounding areas, including parts of Wales. The school was founded in 1945 by Mrs Florence Longman and became a limited company in 2009 with four directors who administer the school, all of whom are members of the Longman family. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher was appointed in September 2014 and the post of deputy headteacher was created in September 2015.
- 1.2 There are 172 pupils in the school, with 41 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), of whom 15 are full-time, and 131 pupils in Years 1 to 6. There are currently thirty-two pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including three pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans. Eight pupils receive support for English as an additional language (EAL). The school has identified 52 pupils as being able, gifted or talented. The majority of pupils are British, with a small minority from other cultures, and pupils are mainly from families with a professional background. The ability profile of the school is above the national average, with variances in the spread of abilities between different cohorts.
- 1.3 The school aims to be an inspirational primary school delivering exceptional learning; it seeks to provide a secure, stimulating and caring environment where childhood is celebrated and the partnership between child, parent and staff can flourish. In addition, it aims to live out the values of the Christian faith while respecting and valuing those of all faiths or none. The school strives to enrich the curriculum with a range of visits, visitors and extra-curricular opportunities.
- 1.4 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used by the school from Reception and throughout this report to refer to year groups. The school refers to the Nursery as Kindergarten.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 The school successfully fulfils its aims to offer a rounded independent primary school education by providing interesting lessons, excellent care and exceptional parental relationships, underpinned by Christian values. The quality of the pupils' achievements is good. Throughout the school, including in the EYFS, pupils make good progress for their ability. The recommendation of the previous inspection to ensure that the outdoor environment is used more effectively in the EYFS has been fully resolved. Pupils with SEND and those with EAL also achieve well and make good progress, due to the well-targeted support and guidance they receive. In response to a recommendation at the time of the previous inspection, curriculum planning is now thorough and offers a co-ordinated approach, the weekly timetabled curriculum being heavily weighted towards mathematics and English. The extra-curricular provision is excellent and pupils are provided with an extensive range of after-school clubs. Teaching is good. Teachers know their pupils extremely well and offer appropriate levels of both academic and pastoral support. Where teachers have excellent subject knowledge, the outcomes for pupils are very high, but more able pupils are not always challenged and extended in some lessons. Marking is good but does not always clearly identify next steps in learning to make clear to the pupils what they should do to improve.
- 2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent throughout the school. The strong moral code, underlined by The Firs Way code of conduct, is clearly understood and respected by all pupils and modelled by adults. Behaviour is excellent throughout the school, underpinned by a strong Christian ethos and common purpose. The previous inspection recommendation to fully utilise daily routines, such as snack times, to promote the personal independence skills of children in the EYFS has been fully resolved. Pastoral care is excellent. Pupils feel valued and well cared for, and all staff show considerable concern and sensitivity towards the pupils' needs. The arrangements for welfare, health and safety, including safeguarding, are good and well understood by all staff. Improvements to key information on the single central register ensure that staff appointments are now more clearly recorded and the updated safeguarding policy is now fully compliant. Safeguarding training is thorough and up to date, and good links exist between the school and local agencies.
- 2.3 Governance is good. The directors know the school very well and are a familiar presence around the school. They are committed to the future success of the school and have invested appropriately in the staff, accommodation and learning resources. The breadth of skills and expertise on the board is limited and there is not always sufficient challenge to the school's leadership. The quality of leadership and management is good, with strong links with parents and guardians being a particular strength of the school, an improvement since the previous inspection. The newly formed senior leadership team is fully supported by the directors in their development plans. Subject leadership is developing, but is not yet embedded in all subjects to contribute to the raising of standards across the whole curriculum.

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 the marking policy is consistently applied across all subjects and year groups in order that next steps in learning are clearly identified.
2. Develop further within all subjects the role of the subject co-ordinator.
3. Extend the breadth of skills and expertise in governance to further support and challenge the school's leadership.

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 Children in the EYFS demonstrate great enjoyment in their learning; they approach activities enthusiastically, fully immersing themselves in their chosen task, and display good thinking skills. They achieve well in relation to their starting points and capabilities. Children in the Nursery demonstrate a love for reading and they excitedly recall stories, showing a solid knowledge of characters, as seen when they shared their favourite book with friends for World Book Day. They are beginning to write for a purpose and spontaneously use numbers in their play, such as whilst counting and sorting coloured frogs, and when 'baking' for the 69 children coming to a role-play party. When they reach Reception, children confidently use their knowledge of sounds linked to letters to read and write sentences, and demonstrate growing confidence of mathematical concepts, such as solving subtraction problems using number lines to count backwards. The children's learning is developed through many opportunities for investigating and exploring, using a range of resources that are structured and made available for them. Across the EYFS, children ably use tablet computers independently to reinforce their learning. By the end of the EYFS, the majority of children reach the expected levels of development for their age in all areas of learning, with many exceeding these expectations. Children with SEND or EAL make very good progress and receive targeted support and guidance.
- 3.3 Throughout the year groups, pupils are well educated in accordance with the aims of the school to provide a primary school experience in a secure, stimulating and caring environment where the partnership between child, parent and staff can flourish. This enables the pupils to develop their own talents and transfer to a range of senior schools, including selective independent schools. Pupils demonstrate good levels of knowledge, skills and understanding.
- 3.4 Pupils have good mathematical skills and can solve problems logically. For example, during a Year 4 mathematics investigation, pupils measured carefully and chose the correct formula for calculating the perimeter of regular and irregular shapes. In science, younger pupils made predictions about what would happen when various objects were placed in water and carefully observed the results. Pupils are literate and articulate, and listen well. In a Year 5 English lesson, pupils demonstrated excellent literacy skills by interpreting narrative poems, which they read fluently to each other. Pupils are confident in their use of information and communication technology (ICT), which has been enhanced by the availability of tablet computers to use in the classrooms. Pupils successfully compete in local and national competitions in athletics, cross country, football and netball, and a small number of pupils have recently been awarded sports scholarships to local selective senior schools. National success has also been achieved in the Junior Language Challenge and national success has been achieved in art, demonstrating pupils' creativity. Pupils participate effectively in singing at local and regional events, as well as successfully achieving in individual instrumental examinations at various grades on different instruments. During local festivals, as well as in school productions and assemblies, pupils have opportunities to develop their drama and public-speaking skills.

- 3.5 Pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance in national tests but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be excellent in relation to national age-related expectations. Pupils follow a broad curriculum, and from the evidence obtained from lesson observations, interviews and the pupils' written work, this judgement is confirmed. This level of attainment, as judged, indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. At the age of eleven, pupils enter a wide selection of schools, including selective and non-selective maintained and independent schools, locally and nationally.
- 3.6 The achievement of pupils with SEND, including those with EHC plans, and those with EAL is good and in line with that of other pupils. They make good progress, due to the support they are given by specially trained staff. More able pupils make good progress but opportunities to extend and challenge them in lessons are limited. The pupils' attitude to learning is good. They take great pride in their work, which is well presented and organised. They enjoy their lessons, working collaboratively and independently to make good progress.

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

- 3.7 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is good.
- 3.8 In the EYFS, the educational programmes provide children with a firm foundation, covering all the required areas of learning extremely well. There is an effective balance between self-chosen and adult-led activities, and very good use is made of both the indoor and outdoor environment, which was a recommendation at the previous inspection and is now a strength of the school. Children's interests and needs shape the curriculum. For instance, the Reception topic Where in The World has included countries with which children have a particular link, whereas in the Nursery a topic on the Queen was initiated by the children following a discussion on her role. This information is used extremely well to plan highly appropriate topics and experiences, which in turn helps children to make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and abilities. Specialist teaching for music, and additionally French in Reception, further enriches the quality of the curriculum. Staff pay due care and attention to ensuring that children with SEND or EAL have full access to the educational programmes by providing support and additional resources where necessary.
- 3.9 In Years 1 to 6, the curriculum is effective in covering the requisite areas of learning and makes a good contribution to the pupils' achievements whilst supporting the aims of the school to provide interesting lessons for pupils and excellent support. The curriculum policies are thorough and are based around the needs of the pupils. The curriculum is supported by an extensive extra-curricular programme for the size of the school, which enhances pupils' all round curricular experience. The school's commitment to sport has been recognised with the Gold Sportsmark Award and professional coaches provide support for gymnastics, swimming and football. All parents and pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaires were very appreciative of the curriculum and the extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities the school provides, including some clubs for the youngest pupils.
- 3.10 The school has a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) programme that promotes British values, and opposing views are presented when covering political issues. Pupils are taught the effect of exercise on the body and cover a range of topics aimed at helping them to develop healthy lifestyles through understanding the need for a balanced diet and looking after

themselves, for example by cleaning their teeth properly. Pupils learn about different institutions, including parliament, the rule of English law and the impact of their actions on other people. Year 6 pupils were keen to talk about democracy during discussions and relate this to how the school council works.

- 3.11 The school has taken steps in resolving the recommendation at the time of the previous inspection to ensure balance in the curriculum by having a co-ordinated approach to planning. However, the curriculum is heavily weighted towards mathematics and English, which can limit the teaching of creative subjects in the planned weekly curriculum.
- 3.12 Numerous educational visits enhance the curriculum; for example, younger pupils visited a local museum to learn about the Victorians and older ones visited the Bridgewater Hall to learn more about the Halle Orchestra. Residential visits for all year groups from Years 3 to 6 are a highlight for many pupils, who commented on them with enthusiasm in discussions. Specific study days are set aside for pupils to study particular subjects to enhance the curriculum, for example history and science days and the Firs Fest, which is a week of topic-based activities.
- 3.13 Support for all pupils with SEND or EAL is embedded within the curriculum. Pupils have full access to the educational programme through the support provided as well as additional targeted resources where needed. There is a clear understanding of the needs of individual pupils, who are identified at an early stage, and staff work closely with parents to fully understand any specific difficulties. Pupils are provided with individual educational plans, which are well understood by all the staff working with the pupils and are shared with parents and pupils in appropriate language. Pupils with EAL receive a mixture of individual support and careful guidance in class, where their vocabulary in terms of subject-specific language is developed and they are given opportunities to contribute orally, with their efforts recognised by other pupils. The provision for pupils who are more able is developing through a range of extra-curricular clubs and opportunities to take part in targeted activities, including those provided by local senior schools, but is not yet inter-woven into the taught weekly curriculum.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.14 The contribution of teaching is good.
- 3.15 Staff in the EYFS demonstrate a strong understanding of how young children learn, promoting learning and development extremely well. They adopt an enthusiastic approach when introducing activities, making learning relevant and encouraging children to try their best. Staff make effective use of questioning to extend children's thinking skills, as seen when Reception children were encouraged to think about how they could adapt their salt dough mixture to acquire the correct consistency. Thorough assessment documents demonstrate that staff know all children well, including those with SEND or EAL, and they make very good use of information gathered to closely plan future activities to match children's needs. Staff make excellent use of a wide range of good quality resources both indoors and out, taking care to ensure that children can independently access as many of these as possible. They are highly successful in this, as seen in the Nursery when children made sensible choices, learning about concepts such as weight on a tablet computer and number whilst engaging in purposeful play. Interactive displays, such as the Reception challenge area, encourage children to take responsibility for their own learning, which they do very well.

- 3.16 Throughout Years 1 to 6, teaching is effective in promoting pupils' progress and supports the school's aims to encourage them to do their best and enjoy their learning. Almost all the teaching observed was good, with many examples of excellence. Staff know their pupils extremely well. They adopt an enthusiastic approach when introducing activities, making learning relevant and engaging, thus meeting the one of the main school aims to make lessons interesting. The excellent rapport between children and staff seen in the EYFS continues in Years 1 to 6, where all pupils, including those with SEND or EAL are encouraged to participate in lessons without fear of failure. An atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance is modelled effectively by teachers, who actively promote British values and present political issues in a balanced way.
- 3.17 Lessons are well planned, learning objectives are made clear to the pupils and a range of strategies is generally used to extend pupils' thinking skills. Behaviour in lessons throughout the school is excellent and strong collaborative opportunities are developed, enabling pupils to take part in mature and insightful discussions, for example when discussing in a religious education (RE) lesson the significance of saying sorry.
- 3.18 In the best lessons, teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and effectively question their pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding. In some lessons, where teachers' subject knowledge is less secure, opportunities to challenge the more able pupils are insufficient. Teachers have good management of time in lessons and pupils are kept engaged through a range of tasks and a good pace for learning. Extension and investigative work is not promoted consistently in every subject or lesson. Pupils with SEND or EAL receive appropriate levels of adult support, allowing them to access the lesson fully. The needs of pupils with EHC plans are fully met by the school's provision, catering effectively for medical and learning needs and disabilities. Teachers have access to a range of resources to enhance their teaching and this included the effective use of ICT in some lessons observed. The recent addition of tablet computers has provided the pupils with more opportunities for independent learning and research.
- 3.19 A new mark scheme has been introduced across the school. At its most effective, the marking provides a positive comment with details of how to improve, with a reply from the pupil acknowledging the teacher's comment. However, this approach is not consistent across the school and the next steps in learning are not always clearly identified for the pupils to understand.
- 3.20 Since the previous inspection, the school has further improved its monitoring of pupils' performance. The implementation of a new information management system has enabled data on pupils to be tracked over time and can be used by staff at all levels. The school is now able to compare the progress and attainment made by pupils against nationally available standardised data and has started to use this data to set more realistic targets for all pupils. A recent initiative has been to successfully improve the quality of the pupils' standard of handwriting across the school.
- 3.21 In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, a very small minority of parents and pupils expressed concerns about homework. These included the setting of too much homework in some year groups, and concern from pupils that homework is not always appropriate or helps them to learn. The inspectors looked at the use of homework in lessons and discussed this with staff and pupils during discussions. Whilst there were some inconsistencies in the amount and frequency of homework being set between year groups, the inspectors found that homework is

used well overall to reinforce the learning and to offer extension activities to pupils in some subjects beyond the classroom. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire indicated that their teachers help them to learn, and almost all said that staff make sure they have the right amount of work to do.

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 personal development of children in the EYFS is excellent, and they develop confidence to make their own decisions, and work harmoniously with and alongside other children and adults. They behave extremely well, sharing and appreciating each other's differences. They are mindful of the need to care for the environment, as seen whilst Reception children carefully weeded flower beds. British values are embedded highly successfully across the EYFS, with children learning the importance of key principles including law and democracy through topics and discussions and by taking on roles of responsibility, for example as daily helpers in the Nursery and by being elected members of the school council in Reception. Children are suitably prepared for the move into their next class; they are very much part of the close-knit school where all members of the community know each other very well. This, together with their excellent levels of social and emotional development, means that the transition between classes is as seamless as possible.

4.3 The pupils' spiritual development is excellent, in line with the aims of the school. Pupils develop a strong awareness of other faiths through their RE lessons, where they study the beliefs and practices of a number of religions. Discussions with their learning partners about faith topics are encouraged in order to deepen their understanding. Pupils learn about a number of festivals of different faiths, which are celebrated in assemblies. They appreciate the wonders of the natural world and express their enjoyment of creative subjects such as music, art and drama, which also help the pupils to develop their self-awareness and self-esteem. The Christian principles upon which the school was founded underpin The Firs Way, the school's code of conduct, and this is central to the successful development of the pupils' personal qualities. Pupils are confident and well mannered, and have a strong spiritual and moral understanding.

4.4 The pupils' moral development is extremely good. They have a mature and developing moral compass to distinguish right from wrong, accepting responsibility for their behaviour and respecting the law, and a desire to help those who are less fortunate than themselves. The comprehensive PSHEE programme also encourages pupils to reflect on how their actions can contribute positively to the lives of those within the local community and those living further afield. They organise themselves efficiently when arranging events to support a number of local, national and international charities. They support the homeless and families in difficulties, and a recent event initiated by the school council saw the pupils raise a considerable amount of money to help buy chickens for some African families, when everyone dressed up as chickens. In discussions with the pupils and in lesson observations, they were very articulate and showed awareness beyond their years about the feelings of others and the likely impact of their words and actions.

4.5 The pupils' social development is excellent. They care for each other and take a pride in their school. These attributes are developed through the many opportunities all the pupils have to take on responsibilities either as classroom monitor, a member of the school council, an eco-warrior or a sports leader, and when they reach Year 6, a prefect. Hence, while a very small minority of pupils in their responses to the questionnaires felt that they do not have the opportunity to take on responsibilities, inspection evidence did not support their view. The family ethos of the school

encourages older pupils to support younger pupils and the younger ones aspire to be like their role models. Transition between classes is excellent, including from the Nursery to Reception, and from the EYFS to Year 1. Through the house system the pupils' collaborative working is further strengthened – both in the classroom and through inter-house competitions. The pupils are thoughtful of others in the wider community; for example, a neighbour celebrating his 100th birthday was presented with a cake. Pupils are encouraged to understand the traditional British values of democracy through elections for the school council. To further enhance the pupils' understanding, the school held a mock election at the time of the General Election, complete with manifestos and hustings for the voters. The pupils have a broad general knowledge of the public institutions and services of England, enhanced by educational visits, including a recent trip to the courts in Chester.

- 4.6 The pupils' cultural development is excellent. They demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of their own cultural heritage, and visits to local museums and concerts further enhance this across all areas of the curriculum. Pupils from other cultures enjoy sharing their traditions and these are celebrated, promoting further understanding and tolerance of diversity. The pupils enjoy themed cuisine experiences when studying a particular country. Speakers and artists visit throughout the year, particularly during the extremely popular annual Firs Fest, to further enhance the cultural experience of pupils. Pupils learn to show empathy for national events such as Remembrance Day. Their charity work and their links with schools in New Zealand, India and Estonia encourage tolerance and understanding between different local, national and international groups. Pupils respect all people, and identify and combat discrimination of any form. By the time they leave the school, they have achieved an excellent standard of personal development and are well equipped to move on to their next schools.

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

- 4.7 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.8 In the EYFS, friendly, caring staff are successful in creating a warm and welcoming environment in which children settle quickly and demonstrate that they feel safe. All children have a key person who knows them particularly well, as do the other members of staff who work within the classes. Key people show due care and attention to meeting the needs of individual children, both pastorally and academically. Staff promote positive relationships extremely well; behavioural expectations are consistently implemented across the setting. Children understand these and follow the rules carefully; as a result there is a notable atmosphere of mutual respect evident across the setting. Staff foster children's independence through their daily routines, an improvement since the previous inspection, and teach them how to keep safe; for example, they teach them how to use equipment correctly and supervise them suitably whilst using technology. Children understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle; they are beginning to grasp the effect that exercise and diet have on their bodies and are sensible whilst making choices at lunchtime. Staff take the opportunity to discuss healthy eating and promote personal skills during mealtimes. Nursery staff invite visitors such as a lunchtime supervisor to discuss this further with the children, thus successfully addressing a recommendation from the previous inspection.
- 4.9 The staff provide extremely effective support and guidance for the pupils throughout the rest of the school, in line with its aims, underpinned by comprehensive policies and procedures, and these make an effective contribution to pupils' personal

development. Pupils feel very well cared for by the staff, and by fellow pupils, who show mature and considerate responses to the needs of their peers. Relationships between staff and pupils, and amongst the pupils themselves, are a significant strength of the school. The staff know the pupils very well and are able to meet the individual needs of pupils with care and sensitivity. The caring ethos is embedded throughout the school and this contributes successfully towards a strong family feel. Expectations set for the pupils by staff are high, and pupils work hard to meet and exceed these. Pupils receive guidance from their class teacher, who is their main point of contact. Pastoral issues are discussed in staff meetings and during leadership meetings, and any action needed is carefully considered, with parents being contacted where necessary. Senior staff are also trained as counsellors and offer suitable assistance and guidance to any pupils experiencing emotional issues. Almost all pupils in their questionnaire responses felt that they have someone to whom to turn if they have a concern.

- 4.10 Pupils are encouraged to be healthy through developing good eating habits and taking regular exercise. Most pupils take advantage of the balanced and nutritious cooked school lunches, which take into account lifestyle choices of families, special dietary requirements and allergies. During discussions, some pupils expressed a wish that there was an element of choice with the cooked lunches, whilst a small minority of pupils choose to bring in sandwiches from home. In addition to physical education lessons, pupils have the opportunity to develop their interest and participation in regular exercise through many sporting clubs offered as part of the extra-curricular programme.
- 4.11 The school is effective in promoting good behaviour and guarding against harassment and bullying. The behaviour of pupils throughout the school is excellent and all pupils refer to The Firs Way, fully understanding the code of behaviour developed for the pupils. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaires, some pupils felt that teachers are not fair in the way that rewards are given out. Examination of records and discussions with pupils and staff did not support this view. The school's leadership monitors rewards and sanctions carefully, with appropriate intervention to ensure that both are used in accordance with the published policies and promote good behaviour. Where unacceptable behaviour takes place, the school deals quickly and effectively with such cases, having due regard to any personal or home circumstances a pupil may be experiencing. Careful and detailed records are kept to monitor behaviour and bullying, and the school's leadership is effective in following up any patterns of misbehaviour. Pupils expressed how safe and secure they feel and were very confident that the school would deal with any cases of bullying or misbehaviour swiftly. All parents who responded to the questionnaire indicated that the school achieves high standards of behaviour.
- 4.12 The school has a suitable plan to improve educational access for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The views of pupils can be heard effectively through the school council, which speaks on a number of initiatives on behalf of pupils from Reception to Year 6. For example, suggestions for fund raising for particular charities and for deciding on the choice available for after-school clubs for pupils are made, such as the introduction of a debating club.

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

- 4.13 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is good.
- 4.14 In the EYFS, great importance is placed upon promoting children's welfare, ensuring that they are kept safe from harm. All staff are suitably trained for their role, and are thoroughly aware of their responsibilities for health and safety, as well as safeguarding. Thorough risk assessments are undertaken and reviewed at regular intervals. Procedures to safeguard children are robust, with staff aware of whom to turn should they have any concerns. Staff are vigilant and aware of the need to adhere to the arrangements for preventing radicalisation and extremism. Those that handle food have been suitably trained in food hygiene. The school successfully promotes and monitors prompt and regular attendance; this is supported by an efficient drop-off and collection system and clear guidelines for parents on how to notify the school of any absences.
- 4.15 Across the school, arrangements for welfare, health and safety make an effective contribution to fulfilling the school's aims and to the pupils' personal development. Health and safety procedures and policies are comprehensive and include suitable accommodation for pupils who are ill in the medical room, as well as providing sensitively for pupils who have SEND. Systems to administer medicines and first aid are implemented well, with records generally being well kept. Appropriate numbers of staff are trained in first aid and paediatric first aid, including in the EYFS. Risk assessments are carried out in line with the risk assessment policy and are numerous and detailed in nature, including for specific activities and visits out of school.
- 4.16 Safeguarding arrangements are good and have recently been strengthened by the updating of the safeguarding policy and a more accurate recording of start date in the register of staff appointments. Training in safeguarding for all staff takes place at regular intervals and more in-depth training is completed by the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and the deputy DSL, as well as the director responsible for safeguarding. All staff are aware of the correct procedures for reporting concerns about a child or a member of staff to the appropriate authorities. The school has strong and effective relationships with local safeguarding agencies and seeks advice whenever appropriate.
- 4.17 The school has effective measures to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards. Checks are carried out regularly and recorded systematically. Electrical and water testing is undertaken in line with guidance and records are kept, including reports from external contractors. Evacuation procedures are highly effective, as demonstrated during the inspection when the staff and pupils responded in a timely and efficient manner to an unscheduled fire alarm to ensure that all people were evacuated safely. The admission and attendance registers are completed correctly and are backed up and stored as required.

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 four directors provide effective oversight of the school in line with its aims, and discharge their responsibilities for standards, financial planning and investment in staff, accommodation and learning resources. In addition to the executive director working in the school as part of its senior leadership team in the role of bursar with responsibility for support staff and compliance issues, the other three directors are a familiar presence and know the staff, parents and pupils extremely well. The directors have a good oversight of the EYFS provision, one of whom has special responsibility for the setting and visits regularly, speaking with children and staff to gain a useful understanding of all pertinent issues. Formal directors' meetings are held half-termly, and these include a review of the school's safeguarding, health and safety, staffing and curriculum procedures. The headteacher meets with the directors and provides detailed reports on all aspects of the school's life and work, although directors are not always able to offer challenge into educational aspects of the running of the school. There is an effective school development plan for the future, showing that the directors have a very good insight into the working of the school.
- 5.3 The directors are passionate about the ethos of the school and provide pastoral care to staff and pupils, setting the tone for the caring Christian values that permeate at every level. Due to the size and constituency of the board, they have a limited range of skills and expertise, meaning that they do not always offer challenge and support to the headteacher. The executive director takes a lead on updating policies in line with regulatory requirements, working closely with the headteacher. There has been a formal appraisal of the headteacher's performance and this has included feedback from staff and parents. The directors are aware of their responsibilities for monitoring the single central register of appointments and for reviewing the safeguarding policy and procedures annually. Updates made to the single central register during the inspection mean that information is now correctly recorded.

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

- 5.4 The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians, is good.
- 5.5 Strong leadership and management underpin the high quality EYFS provision. Leaders successfully promote safeguarding, and have been effective in creating an ethos where all staff understand the importance of establishing an environment in which children feel safe and secure, whilst at the same time providing opportunities to nurture creativity and independence. Policies are regularly reviewed, and are implemented. Training in necessary areas such as safeguarding and first aid is kept up to date, with leaders ensuring that all EYFS staff are fully aware of their responsibilities. Management has excellent oversight of planning and practice; they oversee the educational programmes, planning and assessment information, as well as observing sessions, using this information very well to sustain and improve the quality of children's experiences. Staff are well supervised and meet regularly to discuss the children in their care. These meetings, together with the established system of performance management, help to identify future training needs intended to be of benefit to the children.
- 5.6 Leadership and management throughout the school are highly effective in developing a strong vision and development plan for the school, in line with its aims. Since the previous inspection, the school's leadership has been strengthened by the appointment of a new headteacher and the creation of the role of deputy headteacher, both of whom work with the school's executive director to fulfil the school's aims.
- 5.7 The leadership is focused on raising academic standards and has introduced a comprehensive system for monitoring progress, linked to assessments taken by the pupils. This has not yet been fully embedded and pupils' progress is not measured over time and does not allow the setting of individualised pupil targets. Since the previous inspection, the role of the subject co-ordinator has been developed. Those subject co-ordinators who are established in role are beginning to have a positive impact on their subjects across the school, whilst in other subjects the role of subject leader is not yet fully developed. Not all subject co-ordinators are sufficiently aware of the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects across the school and do not monitor pupils' attainment, opportunities for extension work or the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. Leadership has implemented many new initiatives, including a new pupil information management system and a review of the curriculum across the school. These initiatives are not yet fully embedded throughout the school.
- 5.8 A strong sense of family and community pervades the school, supported and developed by leadership, ensuring that the school's aims are met to provide a love of learning and strong pastoral care for the pupils. A new professional development review system promotes open dialogue between the leadership and teachers, sharing findings of classroom observations and promoting opportunities to share best practice within the school and to benefit from links outside it.
- 5.9 Leadership and management have been highly effective in recruiting, motivating and developing high quality staff. Proper care is taken when recruiting staff, although there have been some inconsistencies recording information on the single central register of appointments, which were corrected by the close of the inspection. The

school's leadership has developed a strong set of relevant policies and procedures, which are regularly reviewed and updated by the appropriate staff before being taken to the school's directors for approval. Excellent policies and procedures for welfare, health and safety have been put into practice. The school's leadership is committed to ensuring equal treatment of individuals and groups within the school, including those pupils with SEND or EAL and the more able.

- 5.10 The school benefits from hard-working and dedicated staff, both academic and support staff, who work together as a team to greatly benefit the pupils at all levels. Staff are suitably trained in areas such as welfare, health and safety and in safeguarding. Leadership actively promotes fundamental British values, including in the EYFS, such as respect for other people, democracy and English law, which are evident in the ethos of the school.
- 5.11 Well-established links exist between the school, parents and external agencies, so that specialist support can be provided for individuals if the need arises. Through this, together with the promotion of the school's aims and ethos, leaders and managers foster an inclusive environment where diversity, equality and British values are central to life at school. Leaders and managers regularly undertake self-evaluation that includes the views of staff, parents and pupils. This feeds into the succinct plans for future development that successfully identify priorities for improvement and are shared with parents.
- 5.12 In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire and through discussion, parents of children in the EYFS reported that they are extremely happy with the standard of care and education provided by the school. They feel well informed about their children's progress and value the opportunities for regular discussions that exist in addition to the formal parents' evenings and useful frequent reports. Parents feel suitably involved in their children's learning; for instance the Stay and Play sessions in the Nursery and the flexi-morning drop-off period across the EYFS are viewed as valuable opportunities to gain insight into their children's life at school.
- 5.13 Throughout the school, outstanding relationships with parents are a key strength and very much appreciated by parents. In particular, parents value the family atmosphere and care for and knowledge of the pupils' family circumstances, which is a significant feature of the ethos of the school. High levels of satisfaction with almost all aspects of the work of the school and willingness to highly recommend the school to other parents were overwhelmingly expressed by parents through the pre-inspection questionnaire and in discussions during the inspection. Parents have excellent opportunities for contact with the school during the beginning and end of the day, with the use of homework diaries being an additional source of exchanging information between home and school. Parents are provided with all required policies and a great deal of practical and useful information through the school's website.
- 5.14 The school fosters a positive working relationship with all parents and organises events such as regular coffee mornings, allowing parents new to the school to meet other parents and key staff, including the school's directors. Useful parent classes on subjects such as e-safety and parenting skills are run by the school and these are well attended and support the PSHEE programmes being taught to pupils. Parents are invited to attend a full range of events throughout the year and have many opportunities to share in the work of their children at school. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a very small minority of parents felt that the school had not handled their concerns well. Inspectors viewed the complaints policy and

procedures and found that the school has very comprehensive records of complaints and clearly identified actions taken to try to resolve any parental issues.

- 5.15 The quality and frequency of reports to parents have significantly improved since the previous inspection. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire a small number of parents expressed the view that they do not have sufficient information regarding their children's progress. Inspection evidence did not support this view. Parents receive highly detailed, comprehensive information about their children's progress several times during the year, as well as having the opportunity to attend formal parent consultation meetings. In addition, the school operates an 'open door' policy, allowing parents to come in and speak with the teachers or headteacher about their concerns at any time.

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