



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

STOWE SCHOOL

INTEGRATED INSPECTION

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Stowe School

Full Name of School	Stowe School
DfE Number	825/6001
Registered Charity Number	310639
Address	Stowe School Stowe Buckingham Buckinghamshire MK18 5EH
Telephone Number	01280 818000
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Email Address	enquiries@stowe.co.uk
Head	Dr Anthony Wallersteiner
Chair of Governors	Mr Christopher Honeyman Brown
Age Range	13 to 18
Total Number of Pupils	772
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (506 boys; 266 girls)
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 111
Number of Boarders	Total: 661 Full: 661 Weekly: 0
Inspection dates	16 Oct 2012 to 19 Oct 2012

PREFACE

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

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, 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.

Ofsted monitors the work of independent inspectorates, including a sample of inspections, and you can find the latest evaluation of the work of ISI on the Ofsted website.

This inspection contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education, personal development and welfare. Until September 2011, Boarding inspections were carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills.

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

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

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

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

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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

Inspectors

Dr Joe Tierney	Reporting Inspector
Dr Trevor Clarke	Team Inspector (Head of Department, HMC School)
Miss Jeanette Guppy	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, GSA School)
Mr David Ibbotson	Team Inspector (Former Director of Studies, HMC School)
Mr Stephen Jefferson	Team Inspector (Former Head of Department, HMC School)
Mr Julian Johnson-Munday	Team Inspector (Head, HMC School)
Ms Susan Lewis-Blake	Team Inspector (Head of Department, GSA School)
Dr Tracey Martin	Team Inspector (Senior Teacher, HMC School)
Mr Clive Thorpe	Team Inspector (Assistant Head, HMC School)
Mr Benjamin Vessey	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, HMC School)
Ms Myra Rogers	Co-ordinating Inspector for Boarding
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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Stowe School is a boarding school for boys and girls aged 13 to 18; it is located just outside the town of Buckingham.
- 1.2 The school is inextricably linked to Stowe House which was begun by Sir Richard Temple in 1676 and over the next century rebuilt into a great classical house surrounded by many acres of landscaped garden, with 31 listed temples and follies. The Stowe Estate was sold in 1921 and then resold, the house and gardens being saved by the foundation of Stowe School in 1923 by the Martyrs Memorial Trust who appointed J F Roxburgh, at which point the school had 99 pupils. Over the years, numerous architects have contributed to the development of the school's accommodation. In 1989 the school gave the garden and its many buildings to the National Trust, and in 1997 the Stowe House Preservation Trust took over the restoration of Stowe House. Ownership of the grounds is therefore shared with the National Trust, which also manages public access.
- 1.3 Stowe was originally formed as a boys' school, but girls joined the sixth form in 1974 and were then admitted from age 13 in 2005. Pupils are drawn from both the local area and further afield, including about ten per cent from abroad. The majority of pupils are full-time boarders accommodated in 12 boarding houses, with day pupils fully integrated into these for pastoral care. At the time of the inspection, there were 772 pupils on roll, including 334 in the sixth form. There are twice as many boys as girls. The school is selective but has quite a wide range of ability on entry in Year 9, with a narrower range in the sixth form. About two in three pupils are of above average ability. One pupil has a statement of educational needs, and 98 receive some form of support in their learning. Seventy-two pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), and 29 of these receive specific support.
- 1.4 Stowe aims to provide an all-round education of the highest standard, and to establish confidence and tolerance of others in a supportive family atmosphere where a Christian ethos encourages pupils to develop a lasting sense of moral, social and spiritual responsibility. Pupils are expected to consider the rights and needs of others and to develop academic excellence, sporting prowess and artistic and musical creativity. They are encouraged to think for themselves, challenge conventional orthodoxies, and to pursue their own enthusiasms.
- 1.5 The school is governed by an executive committee supported by others concerned with finance, buildings and development, education, and areas such as remuneration and the quality of governance, including training.
- 1.6 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum equivalence are shown in the following table.

School

School	NC name
Third Form	Year 9
Fourth Form	Year 10
Fifth Form	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 Stowe is a very successful school which meets its aims of providing pupils with a high quality all-round education and in inculcating in pupils a confidence and tolerance of others, and a strong sense of moral, social and spiritual responsibility. Pupils achieve well, both in the classroom and in public examinations, where they achieved their best results at GCSE and A level this year. They attain excellent standards in their extensive range of extra-curricular activities. This is because of good teaching, the pupils' very good attitudes to learning, and the excellent provision of activities which engage them fully and which they greatly appreciate. The school's aims of seeking to promote academic excellence, sporting prowess and artistic and musical creativity are realised.
- 2.2 The personal development of pupils is excellent. They benefit from high quality pastoral care set within a supportive family atmosphere, in line with the school's aims. The result of this is a contented group of young people who develop important personal skills, who are well-rounded, confident and yet not arrogant. Their excellent experience of boarding adds to their personal development. It gives them an opportunity to live within a caring community which is supportive of each individual and challenges them to achieve their best. Pupils are happy and speak with considerable pride about their school. This is because of the excellent relationships established by the staff, who work hard on behalf of the pupils. Stowe's location, in an eighteenth century ducal palace with extensive parkland, adds significantly to the pupils' educational and aesthetic experience.
- 2.3 Excellent governance has enabled the school to continually improve. Governors are supportive; they know the school well and yet are prepared to challenge management appropriately. They have ensured that all regulatory requirements have been met, including those for the national minimum boarding standards. Procedures for the safeguarding of pupils and their health and safety are very secure. Leadership and management at all levels are at least good, and sometimes excellent. The philosophy of the school, with its Christian emphasis and concentration on the development of the individual pupil, is strongly exemplified in the school's leadership. The school has ambitious plans and has made good progress since the last inspection. Recent changes to the management of departments are not yet monitored robustly enough by senior management to ensure consistency across the school. There is also some inconsistency in the quality of the marking of pupils' work. Much work has been done to establish strong links with parents. The success of the school is acknowledged by parents, who have a high opinion of it and are very pleased with all aspects of what it provides and achieves for their children.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

- 2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.
- 2.5 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. To ensure greater consistency in development planning, teaching, and assessment provide management training, as necessary, for some subject leaders and faculty heads.
 2. Improve the consistency of the quality of the marking of pupils' written work.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' achievement and learning is good.
- 3.2 Pupils are very well educated, in line with the school's aims of encouraging pupils to pursue their own enthusiasms and to acquire skills for a successful life and career. They acquire a good knowledge of subjects, and present their work well and in an organised fashion. Pupils have strong literacy skills and express themselves well through the written and spoken word. They are confident and cogent speakers, who are able to describe, argue and explain with articulacy.
- 3.3 Pupils have good skills of numeracy and reasoning; these are well developed and suitably deployed in subjects across the curriculum. They are confident users of information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils have good creative and physical skills, as observed in English, art, design, drama and physical education (PE). Good practical skills enable them, for example in physics, to use and manipulate equipment well. The extensive opportunities for involvement in physical activities allow pupils to develop good, and often outstanding, physical skills.
- 3.4 Pupils' attainment in the wide-ranging programme of activities is excellent. They achieve continued success in a large variety of sports and gain county, national and international honours, for example in riding, cricket and rowing. Similarly, they achieve well in music and drama, as well as the recently introduced external speech examinations. Pupils' participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is extensive and successful. They also take part in competitions such as the UK Mathematics Challenge, and The Bank of England Challenge. In 2012, two in three of those who applied to university gained places in those in the Russell Group.
- 3.5 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2009 to 2011. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. GCSE results have been above the national average for maintained schools. Girls' results in 2010-11 have been similar to the national average for girls in maintained selective schools. A level results have been above the national average for maintained schools and similar to that of maintained selective schools. The 2012 results in both GCSE and A level were the best achieved by the pupils. This means that pupils make good progress from Year 9 to GCSE and from Year 11 to A level. Pupils with learning difficulties and with EAL make good progress and achieve well in public examinations and in their lessons, often exceeding the grades indicated by their initial assessments.
- 3.6 Results in the International GCSE in English as an Additional Language (EAL) are above the worldwide and UK average, and the physics results being broadly in line with the worldwide average.
- 3.7 Pupils show dedication towards their learning, both in and out of the classroom. They are generally very well organised and highly motivated learners. Behaviour in lessons is very good; pupils are co-operative, supportive of one another, and listen with respect to the teacher and to their peers. They have strong relationships with staff and appreciate the extra support they are given in subject clinics, and in the extensive range of activities available.

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

- 3.8 The contribution of the school's curricular and extra-curricular provision is good.
- 3.9 The school meets its aim to provide an all-round quality education. The curriculum gives pupils many opportunities to acquire good skills in numeracy, literacy, speaking and listening, and ICT, all of which contribute to the pupils' successful education. Pupils have variable amounts of time for subjects depending upon their ability and choice of modern foreign languages. All pupils receive an appropriate allocation of time for design technology, but a small number of pupils do not have sufficient time for art. Pupils greatly value a course in visual education which allows them to appreciate their environment in the historic setting at Stowe. The new personal, health and social education (PSHE) programme for Years 9 to 11, is highly effective in promoting pupils' personal development.
- 3.10 A good range of subjects is available for pupils at GCSE. The school is responsive to pupils' educational development, as seen by the recent introduction of computing. There is an appropriate group of subjects taken by all pupils and a requirement to take at least one modern foreign language and a humanities subject, so maintaining an appropriate breadth. Pupils' individual needs are taken into account; for example, some pupils with EAL take fewer subjects and are given additional support in English, whilst able linguists have the opportunity to take additional languages, including Greek or Mandarin. Outside curriculum time, most departments provide frequent clinics which are well used and appreciated by pupils.
- 3.11 In the sixth form, pupils have access to a good range of AS and A level courses which enable them to progress to higher education. Pupils in Year 10 take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme or CCF, which provide good opportunities for personal development within an outward bound context. A recent addition to the curriculum is the Extended Project Qualification which allows pupils to undertake independent research in an area of particular interest to them. Pupils have access to a good careers programme, a well-resourced careers centre and helpful advice on higher education.
- 3.12 An excellent programme of enrichment is available for gifted and talented pupils. Pupils requiring support in their learning are given effective assistance within classes and through individual teaching. Pupils with EAL are supported well in developing their linguistic skills, with many receiving assistance in preparing for examinations in their native tongue. Pupils benefit from the well-staffed library which provides them with a pleasant environment in which to work and learn. It has a good stock of books in most areas but the importance of new technology is also recognised and a new, more interactive, website is being developed.
- 3.13 The curriculum is enhanced by an excellent and extensive programme of extra-curricular activities. Pupils of all ages and abilities are able to expand their personal interests and strengths, particularly in a wide choice of sporting arenas. Additional workshops in creative areas provide opportunities to further practical skills and participation in cultural pursuits. Musical activities include the significant number of instrumental and choral groups who give regular public performances. Eminent former pupils have returned to offer further enrichment through art and music residencies. Pupils benefit from innovative ideas which are being developed, such as able sixth form pupils providing foreign language conversation sessions for younger peers. Many departments offer clubs that allow pupils to enjoy activities and enhance their academic studies. A range of local, national and foreign

educational and sporting visits also help to extend pupils' cultural and social horizons, as do the community initiatives such as 'Service at Stowe'.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.14 The quality of teaching is good.
- 3.15 The teaching promotes the school's aims of aiding pupils' progress and fostering the development of pupils as individuals, and is a major factor in enabling pupils to reach their potential. Just over two in three lessons observed were good or better, and one in four was excellent. Excellent teaching was seen in most subjects. The better lessons were well planned, used activities which matched the needs of pupils and so maintained their interest. In these lessons, teachers had high expectations and work proceeded at a brisk pace, with a strong sense of purpose. Teachers were highly knowledgeable, passionate and asked probing questions designed to challenge pupils to think deeply.
- 3.16 In the less successful lessons there was a lack of pace and pupils were not fully involved in their learning. In some cases the activities resulted in too little challenge and so pupils' progress was restricted.
- 3.17 In some lessons, teachers gave additional tasks to challenge the more able pupils and specific activities to support the least able. Innovative approaches were used, for example, when encouraging imaginative writing in Year 11 geography, where a video clip showing life in an African squatters' camp prompted moving, empathetic writing. In some lessons, opportunities are provided for pupils to work independently, such as in investigations in mathematics. Teachers sometimes make good use of ICT in lessons. Their use of the library stock is uneven.
- 3.18 Teaching enables pupils of all abilities to make effective progress. Teachers know their pupils well and establish an excellent rapport with them. They use praise to encourage pupils and also support them through regular subject clinics where teachers give freely of their time. Pupils with learning difficulties and with EAL are well supported. Teaching meets the requirements of those pupils with a statement of special educational needs.
- 3.19 Pupils' work is generally marked in line with the broad parameters set out in the whole-school marking policy, but the frequency and level of detail varies both within and between departments. At its best, marking is regular and includes careful correction and comments to help pupils to improve, but too often it is superficial, lacking the required detail. However, pupils spoke highly of the helpful oral feedback they received when work was returned in lessons.
- 3.20 Standardised data relating to pupils' attainment is used effectively throughout the school to closely track their progress. This is shared between staff and pupils, and specific targets are set in order to raise standards. Teachers make regular assessments of pupils' attainment and progress and use these findings to match lesson content to the needs of the pupils.
- 3.21 Some pupils felt that quantities of prep set were not always well judged, but the inspection evidence did not sustain these observations.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The quality of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is excellent and fully supports the school's aim of fostering all round tolerant individuals who view the world with confidence and composure.
- 4.2 The growth of spiritual life at Stowe is set within the context of a landscape and buildings of great aesthetic beauty. This, combined with the high quality of pastoral oversight afforded by the staff, helps to ensure that pupils possess a feeling of assurance and calm as they pursue their daily lives. They care for one another and demonstrate a strong commitment to community life. Pupils display a profound sense of belonging; they grow as individuals and have space to develop their insight into religious and philosophical understanding. They have the opportunity in a variety of lessons to consider and reflect upon the intangible. Particularly striking was when a Year 9 lesson examined the designer theory of creation, where pupils' responses were characterised by spontaneity and insight. Pupils lead chapel services with confidence demonstrating a sense of ownership in their celebration of the Christian tradition.
- 4.3 Pupils' moral development is excellent. They know right from wrong and actively participate in a variety of initiatives. These include the mentoring of new pupils, and the peer support group which provides help to those recently arrived in the school, or to those who need additional help in managing personal difficulties. Pupils take a keen interest in debating moral issues, whether in the excellent wide-ranging PHSE course, or through the curriculum which touches on such powerful themes as the legacies of political terror and racism. Pupils demonstrate their practical awareness of the plight of the underprivileged in the strong support they give to the fundraising which benefits those living in the developing world. The pupils' service to the elderly in the local community is a growing initiative attracting enthusiastic support.
- 4.4 Pupils' social development is of a high order. They are self-contained and well-rounded individuals with wide ranging interests who also enjoy a great number of opportunities for social interaction. House plays, dances and film shows are popular events; pupils also meet counterparts from other schools informally. The recent development of a social centre for pupils of all ages has been welcomed by the whole community. Pupils have made further effective use of this venue to launch charitable fund-raising activities.
- 4.5 Pupils gain from the aesthetic and cultural opportunities which abound, such as playing in musical groups, theatre visits and participating in the Luffield Festival. Their participation in a wide variety of visits abroad, for example to Salamanca and Munich, enables them to experience foreign culture through the study of art, language and architecture. Their charitable activity, contact with Old Stoics, and explorations within lessons help them to develop a firm understanding of cultural traditions outside the western world. Pupils from abroad have established opportunities to celebrate aspects of their own culture from which all pupils gain. The tolerance embedded within the school community ensures that a strong mutual respect exists between differing cultural traditions.
- 4.6 Through the PHSE programme and sixth form lectures, pupils acquire a good knowledge of the legal systems of the United Kingdom. Elsewhere, they respond with ready interest to teaching regarding the development of democracy and

government institutions. All this means that pupils have a good standard of personal development by the time they leave school.

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

- 4.7 Arrangements for the pastoral care of pupils are excellent.
- 4.8 The guidance and support pupils receive is strong, and well-defined structures underpin the work of dedicated and empathetic staff. Pupils are appreciative of the pastoral care they receive, and an easy and mutually respectful relationship exists between teachers and pupils. They feel able to approach a wide variety of staff with any concerns. The school's policy of support for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities is laid out in a comprehensive policy that meets all requirements.
- 4.9 The school's policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils is implemented well in practice. Pupils on the school site and in class behave very well. They are courteous, welcoming and converse easily with visitors. They show strong respect for the individual and are immensely loyal to their school, house and to one another. Anti-bullying procedures are widely published and pupils report that bullying was tackled effectively when it arose. Serious sanctions against pupils are logged in an accessible and accurate manner.
- 4.10 Strong participation in the sports and activities programme means that pupils stay active and healthy. The food provided is tasty and nutritious, with appropriate snacks provided in houses.
- 4.11 The school has a suitable and detailed plan to improve the access for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities.
- 4.12 In the questionnaire, a significant number of pupils said the school does not always respond to their views. However, their views are sought and the work of the Stoic Council is appreciated by many pupils. It meets termly and there is good evidence of pupils being able to raise items of concern. Minutes are provided to all pupils via email, but often refer to items being sent for further discussion with other groups. It is therefore not always apparent what the outcomes of those discussions are, and some pupils are not fully aware of what the council achieves on their behalf.
- 4.13 Pupils were generally extremely positive in their response to the pupil questionnaires. Almost all felt there was a good range of activities or that teachers helped them to learn effectively. A considerable minority felt that teachers were not always consistent in giving rewards or sanctions, although there was insufficient evidence to support this view.

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

- 4.14 Arrangements to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils are excellent.
- 4.15 The school takes these issues very seriously and ensures that rigorous management of health and safety matters is in place. Risk assessments, procedures and training, including those relating to fire, are comprehensive and robust. A strong working relationship with the local fire service, which visits regularly, has been established. Regular fire drills are held, suitably recorded, and fire equipment is appropriately checked. The welfare and safety of pupils involved in

extra-curricular activities and school trips are ensured by a rigorous process of monitoring and planning.

- 4.16 Safeguarding policies and procedures are approved and monitored by the school governors, and all staff and senior pupils receive child protection training, supported by a suitably trained designated member of staff. Training is monitored and updated regularly, and issues managed and recorded appropriately. The recruitment policy and procedures are compliant and recommendations from the previous inspection have been met in full.
- 4.17 The school's medical centre, which is well staffed and has good facilities, is successful in ensuring the health and welfare of pupils who are sick and injured. It provides a full range of medical and counselling services for pupils. Detailed medical records are kept and checked, as are records of accidents and near misses. Effective procedures and practices to administer first aid are in place, with staff expertise extensive and widely available.
- 4.18 Attendance and admissions registers are maintained in line with regulatory requirements. The school meets regulatory requirements in relation to the Equality Act 2010.

4.(d) The quality of boarding

- 4.19 The quality of boarding education, provision and care are excellent.
- 4.20 Pupils very much enjoy being boarders at Stowe and appreciate living and working in a place of great natural beauty that improves their experience of boarding. Their personal development is clearly enhanced by their boarding experience. They feel well supported by all boarding staff and develop qualities of confidence, maturity, independence and tolerance. Pupils are extremely polite and thoughtful towards each other and staff, and clearly gain much from living in such a community. The house council meets regularly, and boarders also enjoy regular dialogue with house staff, with whom they have good relationships. Boarders appreciate the work and support of the house staff, including the matrons, all of whom are genuinely loyal and committed to the welfare of their pupils.
- 4.21 The management of boarding is of high quality. The housemasters and housemistresses, who are respected by parents, are well supported by their teams of tutors who are drawn from the academic staff. The school has recently streamlined the system of tutoring within houses so that staff choose this responsibility and see it as part of their professional development. This results in good supervision and engagement with the boarders. One member of the governing body has responsibility for boarding, enabling representation of the interests of the boarders at the highest level.
- 4.22 Boarders have a wide range of people to whom they can turn in times of difficulty, including access to counselling and members of the peer support group. They also talk to house prefects who are seen as helpful in the running of the house. Boarders are loyal to their own houses, and a spirit of friendly competition exists between houses, as remarked on by pupils in connection with a recent house singing competition.
- 4.23 Pupils new to boarding have a good induction programme, including a weekend visit before they start at Stowe and boarders from overseas receive language support where needed. In addition, guide booklets, written as an introduction to each house,

are seen as very useful. New pupils are integrated and supported extremely well by existing boarders of all ages, who are reported to be friendly and helpful.

- 4.24 The team of house staff work well under strong leadership to provide a high standard of care. Individual pupils' needs are well met so that boarders feel well cared for and safe and they receive excellent health care. Effective policies are in place for those who are unwell, with the medical centre being staffed 24 hours a day by qualified nurses, and the school doctors holding weekday surgeries. Appropriate information is shared between medical and boarding staff in a spirit of sensitive confidentiality, as recommended in the previous inspection. Each house also has access to house nurses who visit and talk to the boarders on health topics, as well as providing personal meetings. In addition, other local medical services can also be accessed, such as a dentist and optician. There is an efficient laundry system in the school and some sixth form boarders do their own laundry.
- 4.25 The standard of boarders' accommodation ranges from adequate to excellent. Cleanliness is excellent and the rooms are mostly airy, bright and comfortable. The boarders have access to, and enjoy using common rooms and kitchen facilities in their houses. They have suitable equipment for a range of games, including snooker, table-football and table tennis, as well as television which they may watch at appropriate times.
- 4.26 Although some pupils reported that there was not enough to do at weekends, inspectors felt there was a wide range of activities available. Many of the boarders particularly enjoy the sporting facilities, in addition to the use of the equestrian centre, the golf course and the beagle pack. At weekends they also have the opportunity to visit localities such as Buckingham and Oxford, or else enjoy a more leisurely time on Sunday, perhaps playing games in the grounds. On Saturday evenings they enjoy the socials for various age-groups or film shows in 'The Roxburgh Theatre'. Pupils can also visit the well-stocked school shop, which also contains a café. Boarders maintain contact with their families and friends through mobile phones, internet telephone calls and email. They also have access to information about the world around them through media such as newspapers and television.
- 4.27 The quality of the food is good and pupils start the day with a sustaining breakfast. Boarders with special dietary needs are well catered for, and menus are provided on a three-week cycle, with snacks in the boarding houses which include fresh fruit. Pupils are consulted on the quality of the food. Their responses in the questionnaire indicated a small discontent with the evening meal, but the school has responded by allocating more money for this meal.
- 4.28 Arrangements for the health and safety of boarders are very good. The school keeps records of all risk assessments, complies with fire-safety regulations and holds regular fire drills. The risk assessments are monitored to ensure that they are fully completed and regularly reviewed. This meets the recommendation made at the time of the previous inspection.
- 4.29 The effectiveness of the arrangements for welfare and safeguarding is excellent. Child safeguarding measures are efficient and robust, and all staff have regular training. The school operates a thorough procedure for staff recruitment. Policies are in place to combat bullying and to promote positive behaviour, with pupils reporting that any problems would be dealt with quickly. School rules and

disciplinary sanctions are clear and fair. There is a rigorous system for checking the location of boarders and always sufficient staff supervising them.

- 4.30 Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire showed that parents and boarders were very satisfied with the boarding provision. Parents thought that boarding was well managed and organised, that their children enjoyed the experience, and that boarding helped their child's progress and development. Some pupils commented that the quality of some boys' accommodation did not match that of the girls'. Inspectors noted that girls' accommodation was newer than that of the boys but that improvement works are ongoing. Some boarders felt that their belongings were not safe, but inspection evidence showed that the school operates appropriate policies and practices in this regard.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The governance of the school is excellent.
- 5.2 Governors have overseen the continued development of the school, culminating in its present success. The structure of governance and its administration enables business to be covered effectively. Governors have a very good range of expertise and experience to support the school. Prudent financial management has enabled the governors to continually improve staffing, facilities and resources, such as the rolling programme to improve boarding accommodation. There are ambitious plans for further development outlined in a good strategic plan.
- 5.3 The governing body is highly effective in discharging its responsibilities regarding the safeguarding of pupils and issues related to health and safety. In both of these areas there is a governor with specific responsibility who makes regular visits to the school, works well with appropriate school staff, and reviews and reports their findings. This careful monitoring has ensured that the school meets all statutory requirements, particularly in the recruitment of staff, an improvement since the previous inspection.
- 5.4 Governors know the school well. They receive regular reports from the school's leadership, and an annual welfare report to ensure full compliance with boarding standards. Governors monitor standards of pupils' success in public examinations, and invite senior staff to their meetings to talk on areas of school life. They are supportive, but are willing to challenge the school and so enable improvements to be made.

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

- 5.5 The leadership and management of the school, including links with parents, carers and guardians are good.
- 5.6 The continued improvement and development of the school is testimony to the effective leadership and management. This means that the school meets its aims to provide an all-round quality education and to develop confident pupils who show tolerance of others in a supportive family atmosphere where pupils develop a lasting sense of moral, social and spiritual responsibility.
- 5.7 The structure of management allows the school to meet its needs. An executive management team provides good strategic leadership, and is supported by a strong senior management team which implements policies and ensures the smooth administration of the school. Safeguarding policies and practices are in place and work well. A recent initiative has been to form six faculties, each acting as an umbrella organisation for subject departments. This has eased and simplified the management of subjects by senior staff. Furthermore, a very helpful framework for the administration of departments by heads of faculty has been put in place. At this stage, its implementation is variable in quality and therefore effectiveness. There is a need for a sharper focus to the role of the faculty head and tighter monitoring by both them and the senior management team.

- 5.8 Leadership and management by heads of department are generally good, a factor in the pupils' improved examination performance. Staff feel well supported by the senior management team. Good links between the library and teaching staff are established through the attendance of the library leadership at heads of departments meetings.
- 5.9 The management of pastoral care is successful in providing a caring environment in which pupils learn to consider the rights and needs of others. A strong lead is taken by senior management on boarding. Excellent leadership and management of the boarding provision means that pupils receive a first-rate experience which many enjoy and regard as a home from home.
- 5.10 The school has a clear sense of educational direction which is expressed through a series of development plans covering important areas such as education, finances, and pastoral care, all centred around the main strategic plan of 'Towards 2023'. Not all departments have development plans and some lack specific analysis and detail on what needs to be improved. Analysis of performance in public examinations is good. Results are scrutinised with reference to individual pupils as well as subjects, with senior staff and governors involved. The school does recognise some variation in the quality of teaching and is seeking to promote academic excellence by placing an emphasis on the sharing of best practice.
- 5.11 Management is successful at securing and supporting high quality staff. A comprehensive induction programme for staff new to the school is in place, as are measures for training staff in safeguarding issues and health and safety. Opportunities for staff development are generally good; there is a transparent policy for professional development, and the school supports staff through teacher training, and other higher degree courses. However, the last inspection report recommended improved training on academic management for middle managers, and this has still not been fully addressed.
- 5.12 The views of parents are actively sought and acted upon. Results from the parental questionnaire show that parents are highly satisfied with all aspects the school offers. Parents are particularly pleased with leadership and management, the range of extra-curricular activities, the boarding experience, the information provided by the school and the pastoral care of their children. The school has established good relationships with parents, who feel that communication is good, for example through the regular 'Stowemail' newsletter and by easy contact with staff. Any concerns parents may have are taken seriously and recorded in accordance with published procedures. Parents and prospective parents have access to the necessary information about the school and its policies. The Parents' Association is a recent initiative in response to a feeling that parents wanted to be more involved with the school.
- 5.13 Parents are very appreciative of the full written reports they receive each term. Subject comments are detailed and helpful, with the self-evaluation by the pupils a very constructive feature. Comments by tutors and house staff show that they have a thorough knowledge of each individual, in line with the school's philosophy.
- 5.14 The school has made good progress since the last inspection. Links and communication with parents have been refined, procedures for the recruitment of staff now meet statutory requirements, the formation of heads of faculties is helping to improve management, and an emphasis on improving teaching has begun.

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