

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### **Birkenhead School**

Full Name of the School	<b>Birkenhead School</b>
DCSF Number	<b>344/6023</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>1093419</b>
Address	<b>58 Beresford Road, Oxton, Wirral CH43 2JD.</b>
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Email Address	<b>headmaster@birkenheadschoo.co.uk</b>
Headmaster	<b>Mr John Clark</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Andrew Thomson</b>
Age Range	<b>3 months to 18 years</b>
Gender	<b>Boys from 3 months to 18 years; girls from 3 months to 4 years and from 16 years to 18 years</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007</b>

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005 and May 2007.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Birkenhead School was founded in 1860. It became a direct grant school in 1935 and fully independent in 1976. The preparatory school (prep) was founded in 1889. Once a boarding school, it no longer takes boarders, though occasionally a very few pupils, whose families make their own arrangements for their children's accommodation, are hosted by local families. Currently, the school provides education for boys from the age of 3 months to 18 years and girls up to age 4 and from age 16 to 18. The school has 642 pupils: 249 in the prep and 393 in the senior school; 112 pupils are in the sixth form, 6 of whom are girls.
- 1.2 The school is situated in the north-east quarter of the Wirral, but recruits pupils from the whole Wirral peninsula. They come from a variety of backgrounds, but mainly from professional families. Admission to the prep is generally at one of three points: the Foundation Stage (rising threes and fours), Reception (rising fives) and Year 3 (seven plus). No formal testing takes place for entry into the Foundation Stage, but subsequently pupils spend a day in school being assessed formally or informally as the school feels appropriate. Formal testing is in reading, spelling, English, and mathematics or reasoning. Standards on entry at the Foundation Stage are above the average for maintained primary schools. Pupils moving from the prep to the senior school are assessed internally. New entrants to the school or those seeking a scholarship are tested in English, mathematics and verbal reasoning. The school's standardised tests show the average attainment on entry to the senior school is well above the average for all maintained secondary schools and so if pupils perform in line with their abilities, they should reach well above average standards.
- 1.3 No pupils have a statement of special educational needs, but the school has identified thirty-eight pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), fifteen of whom receive support from the school. Four pupils do not have English as their principal language but all are fluent English speakers. Fifty-four pupils are receiving some fee support from the government-funded nursery scheme. Seventy-four pupils have bursaries and 36 have been awarded scholarships. Most pupils stay on into the sixth form, which is open to both boys and girls from other schools.
- 1.4 The school's aims are to: provide an open and happy community in which endeavour and achievement flourish; offer a well-proven route to academic success, seeking to enable pupils to realise their potential and prepare them for later life; create a caring and structured environment in which pupils grow in self-confidence and enjoy many opportunities for teamwork and personal development; and set high standards for itself and for its pupils, not just academic but personal standards of integrity, self-discipline, compassion and respect for others.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

### **The Educational Experience Provided**

- 2.1 Throughout, the school provides a good educational experience for the pupils, which matches the school's aims. The curriculum is broad and balanced and well planned. It is well supported by a good range of extra-curricular activities and visits to places of educational interest.
- 2.2 The curriculum follows the Early Learning Goals in the Foundation Stage and most elements of the National Curriculum in the prep and is well planned and balanced, as reported at the time of the previous inspection. In addition, pupils study a modern foreign language in Years 5 and 6, and classical civilisation in Year 6. Good planning in the senior school ensures that balance and breadth, in line with the National Curriculum, continue, which is better than at the time of the last inspection when there was some lack of balance in the curriculum. The number of modern foreign languages that pupils can study is increased and Latin and Greek appear, the former in Year 7, the latter in Year 9. In Years 10 to 13 pupils follow a suitable core of subjects and then choose from a range of optional subjects.
- 2.3 Appropriate, well-planned work is provided throughout the school and the different subjects contribute effectively to pupils' curricular experience, giving them a secure grounding in the skills needed for the next stages of their education. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills, particularly in English, modern foreign languages and classical subjects. A very good example of the progress they make was demonstrated in a Year 5 class assembly where pupils confidently acted out the role of Victorian children. Throughout the school, pupils develop good numeracy skills through subjects such as mathematics, science and geography, the last, for instance, giving pupils in the senior school opportunities for the use of statistics. Physical development is encouraged through activities in the Foundation Stage, and physical education and games as pupils grow older. Good quality art and music support pupils' creative and aesthetic development whilst science, design technology and information and communication technology (ICT), contribute to their understanding of technical issues. Very good displays of work, particularly in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 in the prep, and in art throughout, celebrate pupils' work and enhance their curricular experience. Working together in groups and learning about the importance of good relationships in subjects such as drama, physical education, as witnessed in a Year 9 class involved in badminton, and personal, social and health education (PSHE), further their human and social development. A number of subjects throughout the school offer many opportunities for independent learning, to which pupils respond well.
- 2.4 The extra-curricular programme offers a wide range of opportunities. Pupils make good use of the opportunities within the school and on visits and activities in this country and abroad that further enhance their learning. They speak about their experiences with enthusiasm. Examples in the prep include school productions and visits to different theatres and the local country park and aquarium, while senior pupils have opportunities to visit the First World War Battlefields, play sport abroad, and perform in a variety of school productions. Of particular value in developing pupils' literacy skills further, are the competitions in speaking, handwriting and creative writing held at the end of each year in the prep.
- 2.5 Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education. The prep ensures that pupils make effective progress in their learning and are ready for the demands of secondary education, whilst in the senior school the good grounding in academic subjects and the additional opportunities for work experience, involvement in Young Enterprise and the

- careers advice they receive ensure that pupils are well prepared for higher education or employment.
- 2.6 The school day is well organised. The timetables are well balanced and curriculum planning reflects a thoughtful approach to supporting pupils' learning.
- 2.7 The provision for pupils with LDD and the gifted and talented is patchy. A limited amount of specialist help is available in the school and experts come in from outside school to assess the pupils. A teacher who is trained in dyslexia and based in the senior school, oversees provision for pupils with LDD throughout the school. She works hard to keep staff informed of pupils' particular problems while trying to ensure appropriate provision for them. Where it is thought necessary and parents wish it to happen, pupils receive one or two periods of support either individually, for which parents pay extra, or in small groups. For the most part, pupils follow their studies in their usual classes. In the prep, these pupils have some support from teacher assistants but this is not available in other areas of the school.
- 2.8 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

### **Pupils' Learning and Achievements**

- 2.9 Pupils achieve good standards in relation to their abilities through each stage of the school, a level of attainment sustained since the previous inspection. Pupils gain a good foundation in literacy and numeracy and perform well in their other subjects. Progress in the prep is such that attainment is well above average by the end of Year 6, and good progress continues in the senior school. A number of individuals and teams in the senior school do exceptionally well in a range of extra-curricular activities, as was noted in the previous inspection report, thus fulfilling the school's aim to provide an open and happy community in which endeavour and achievement flourish.
- 2.10 Pupils make good progress in all the Early Learning Goals and become especially competent in literacy and numeracy by the end of Reception. In the rest of their time in the prep they acquire good levels of knowledge in the subjects they study, as in humanities, art and science.
- 2.11 In the senior school, attainment in public examinations is good in relation to pupils' abilities. In the years 2004 to 2006, GCSE results were well above the average for boys in maintained schools. During the same period, A-level results were also well above the average for maintained schools. In 2007, for which no national comparative data was available at the time of the inspection, the school achieved its best A-level results to date.
- 2.12 There are no significant differences in the relative achievement between different groups of pupils or in subjects. As a result of the willingness of teachers to spend time with them and their determined endeavours, those with LDD cope with most of the hurdles that face them and make good progress overall. However, the lack of differentiated work being set for pupils of different abilities in some classes limits the progress of a small number of pupils, a comment made in the previous inspection report.
- 2.13 In activities beyond the taught curriculum, some pupils and teams across the school perform outstandingly well. They reach high standards in music, gaining positions in the National Children's Orchestra, and the choir winning fame in this country and abroad for the quality of its singing. Several pupils reach high levels for their instrumental work in Associated Board examinations. Three pupils have gained The Duke of Edinburgh's Award at gold level recently. In sport, particular success at cricket in Year 13 has resulted in entry to the academy at Lancashire County Cricket Club, while others have won county representation at

different ages in a number of sports. Outstanding gymnastic ability in the prep has led to selection to prepare with the Great Britain squad for the 2016 Olympics, and in support of this, the school has installed special equipment in the prep school gym. Sports teams have also performed well in regional and county competitions and the first XV rugby team achieved success on a recent tour to Chile and Argentina.

- 2.14 Pupils across the school have an outstanding attitude to work and study and apply themselves diligently; they have an excellent work ethic. Pupils of different ages are articulate, good listeners and read fluently. Good quality, well-presented written work is a characteristic of pupils in the prep and of most in the senior school. Some of the writing is lively and there are good examples of extended writing, particularly in the senior school and in projects in the prep. A good example was observed in a Year 6 history project where pupils imagined they were taking part in the First World War Christmas truce and wrote creative and imaginative accounts.
- 2.15 Pupils handle numerical problems and mathematical concepts well, and use their skills confidently in science and geography as well as in mathematics. They use and interpret graphs well. There are examples of good use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning and pupils taking advantage of e-learning. Pupils have a good facility in downloading and editing research, using computers to help in musical composition and taking advantage of word processing. The use of interactive whiteboards by teachers is developing and aids pupils' learning.
- 2.16 Pupils show a good ability to discuss and argue in a range of subjects. For example, they were seen arguing a case in English in the prep and using role play to explore ideas in history in the senior school. When given the opportunity pupils enjoy thinking for themselves and demonstrate good skills in critical reasoning, as in general studies in Years 12 and 13. In a small minority of lessons throughout the school, opportunities for independent learning and thinking were restricted by overly directed teaching.
- 2.17 Pupils take notes, study both in school and at home diligently and organise their work effectively. They work well in groups, and are prepared to accept the rules of the game as observed when playing sport. They respond quickly to the baton when in an ensemble and play with great confidence. In conversation with inspectors, pupils said they enjoyed their lessons, and this was certainly borne out by classroom observations.

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils**

- 2.18 Pupils' development in relation to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural life is excellent. The school succeeds outstandingly well in fulfilling its aim to set high standards for itself and for its pupils, not just academic but personal standards of integrity, self-discipline, compassion and respect for others. Pupils develop an understanding of what it means to them to have a spiritual nature, while recognising the importance of having moral values. They benefit socially from what the school provides, and through their contact with pupils from different ethnic backgrounds, learn respect for the beliefs and practices of others. The positive caring ethos of the school plays a major part in contributing to pupils' personal development.
- 2.19 Spiritual development is promoted through chapel services and well-structured and regular assemblies of a predominantly Christian nature, which encourage pupils to reflect on spiritual and moral issues. The range of church services they can attend enables pupils to recognise the importance of the spiritual nature of human beings and the need to see it in relation to materialism. Pupils see that everyone has different talents and can use them in various ways. The fact that these are celebrated in assemblies as well as in class, helps pupils to develop

- high self-esteem and confidence, and enables them to relate well to adults and their peers. In religious education (RE) they discuss important issues related to the Christian and other faiths. Several pupils each year come forward willingly to be prepared for Confirmation and a Christian Union group meets on a weekly basis. Pupils benefit from having access to a chaplain, who is available to support all members of the community, irrespective of religious belief.
- 2.20 Pupils have a strong moral commitment, recognising what is right and wrong in human relationships. This means they rarely challenge authority or bully their peers. They believe the school rules to be fair, recognise them to be important, and abide by them. Their behaviour is exemplary, demonstrated in class, in corridors, and in the school chapel. Pupils are courteous to adults and to their peers and recognise that there is an important message in the Biblical stories they hear such as the Good Samaritan. They recognise their moral responsibility to others by raising funds for a range of charities, which include a local children's hospice.
- 2.21 Pupils' social development is outstanding. They willingly take on responsibility. In the prep they act as monitors and prefects, happily recognising the importance of being a reliable member of the school. In the senior school the opportunities for responsibility increase as pupils act as team captains and leaders in their respective houses; they conscientiously respond to the calls made upon them in their daily life at school. In the sixth form, in Year 8 and in Year 11, many have duties as prefects and contribute effectively to the smooth running of the school. Their experiences teach pupils the importance of social cohesion and of social and political organisations. In the prep school, for example, pupils are willing to talk about key politicians of the day and the role they play in people's lives. The school council gives senior pupils an opportunity to experience democracy in action and also to influence the school's development. The experiences of several pupils were extended by reaching the national finals of the European Youth Parliament. They have a good knowledge of public institutions and services, which is developed through the extensive PSHE programme, and includes regular visits from outside agencies. The approach to social responsibility across the school has a positive effect on their learning and their personal development.
- 2.22 Pupils' cultural development is good. They learn about people in other lands and times through history and geography and about other faiths in RE. Pupils in the prep know of and respect the celebrations of other faiths, such as Eid and Diwali. They experience the music and art of different countries in lessons and make comparisons with British examples. They learn about their own culture through the opportunities they have participating in school activities and through the various visits they make. Their understanding of their own culture is furthered through activities such as the drama group, the brass group and the school choir and the range of visits they make. Pupils in the senior school also have the opportunity to visit other countries in Europe and beyond. In Spanish, they discuss social issues affecting Spain. All the pupils are aware of the implications of poverty for individuals and its effects in the world and so raise money, for instance, to provide cows for the poor in Rwanda. In history, pupils in the senior school discuss the importance of forgiveness and can relate this to racial tensions.
- 2.23 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

## **The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)**

- 2.24 The quality of teaching is good and a significant amount is outstanding. It is now better than it was at the time of the last inspection and in line with the school's own evaluation. Teaching is successful in helping pupils to make good progress and to reach high standards across the curriculum. The school fulfils its aim to offer a well-proven route to academic success, seeking to enable pupils to realise their potential and prepare them for later life.
- 2.25 In the Foundation Stage, planning is detailed and effective with built-in opportunities for assessment, enabling pupils to reach the Early Learning Goals. From Years 1 to 6 teachers continue to help their pupils learn effectively. Throughout the school lessons are mostly carefully planned and suitable strategies are used to encourage learning. In some instances this leads to teacher-directed learning and at times, teachers seeking good presentation and correct answers at the expense of more flexible approaches. This reliance on formal didactic teaching is evident in some lessons in English and history in the prep and among a few teachers in the senior school. In these classes, pupils have too little opportunity to take responsibility for their work.
- 2.26 Teachers know their pupils well and take account of their prior knowledge, and plan their lessons accordingly. The great strength of the teaching is in providing pupils with informal support and seeking to help them to overcome hurdles which affect their learning. This is usually helpful to those with LDD. However, there is little evidence of differentiated work being provided for pupils with differing needs and, where the teaching is too closely directed, the opportunity to challenge the gifted and talented is not always taken. Teachers are enthusiastic and encourage pupils to develop a genuine interest in their work. In many lessons, particularly when they are doing projects in the prep and in creative subjects throughout the school, pupils are encouraged to think independently and take responsibility for their own work.
- 2.27 Teachers throughout the school are knowledgeable and manage their classes well. They foster in pupils the desire to learn and to persevere with their tasks to produce as good a quality as they can. Their enthusiasm and commitment to their subject rubs off on their pupils, who enjoy what they experience. Teachers often use extra-curricular opportunities to stimulate learning and to encourage pupils to do research into topics such as Roman history, and in Young Enterprise, what will and will not make a profit.
- 2.28 Teaching makes good use of a range of resources, which are appropriate and plentiful. Pupils have good access to books in classrooms and the library in the prep, and in the well-stocked library in the senior school. Some teachers make good use of ICT in their lessons, as the research carried out by pupils and the display around the school demonstrates. The use of violins by the whole class among younger pupils in the senior school raised interest, improved skills and in a practical way, improved pupils' numeracy, listening skills and understanding of notation.
- 2.29 Pupils respond well to the overall good quality of teaching. They have a positive attitude to their studies in lessons, are attentive and persevere. They enjoy practical lessons and those in which they can take some responsibility for what they do.
- 2.30 The quality of assessment is variable. At the Foundation Stage teachers record what pupils achieve systematically and use this to aid their planning not only for the class but also for individual pupils. In the rest of the school pupils' work is marked regularly and some teachers give useful formative comments. On occasions, however, work is marked with a tick and an encouraging comment to build up a pupil's confidence. Too rarely is there a constructive comment designed to further a pupil's learning and understanding or to lead to

improvement through re-drafting. There is little evidence of formal target setting by teachers but they do a good deal of informal assessment, which helps them know their pupils well and supports pupils in their learning.

- 2.31 The school now does a good deal of data analysis based on standardised test and examination results. In the prep, standardised tests are used to measure pupils' ability on entry and to track their progress. The information is shared with staff and enables them to identify particular weaknesses, though it is not used fully in helping teachers' planning. In the senior school, standardised tests and the results of public examinations at 16 and 18 are used to compare results over time and to recognise any areas for improvement. The deputy head (academic) shares these with departments, though not all use them to advantage. However, this and more informal methods such as teacher recommendation affect the setting by ability of pupils in different subjects.
- 2.32 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

### **3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils**

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care that staff devote to the pupils and their well being throughout the school is outstanding. The school's aim to create a caring and structured environment in which pupils grow in self-confidence and enjoy many opportunities for teamwork and personal development is well met. The good relationships between pupils and staff are summed up in one response to the pupils' pre-inspection questionnaire, with the words: "the school has an overall good environment and is a pleasant place to work". Pastoral care is, as it was described at the time of the last inspection, a "particular strength of the school".
- 3.2 Staff know the pupils well and are very supportive. In lessons and in form groups the relationships between teachers and pupils are very good, with teachers taking a significant interest in the progress of the pupils as learners and as individuals.
- 3.3 In the prep school the form tutors have an important role in providing a safe environment in which pupils feel secure. The structure is clear and understood by pupils and staff; it works very well. Any concerns about pupils are shared among the staff and communicated to the headmistress of the prep. Where necessary, action is taken. Pupils talked fondly of their teachers and the concern they showed for them. In the senior school the structure for pastoral care has recently been modified and is undergoing a period of transition. Form tutors are now supported by year heads who in turn are supported by a deputy head. This provides a good structure, to respond to pupils' needs and provide them with a feeling of security and confidence. However, the system had only been in place for a short time when pupils were asked to complete the pre-inspection questionnaire and the new system did not appear to be fully understood by the pupils. Consequently, a number expressed doubt as to whom they might go if they had a problem and what response they were likely to receive. In conversations with pupils and in observations around the school, however, inspectors found that pupils felt secure and well cared for and that they recognised that staff took an interest in their well being.
- 3.4 The arrangements for encouraging good behaviour and respect for others are clear, fair and work well. The school's rules, though slightly different in the prep to those in the senior school, are well known to pupils and to parents and are respected. The code of conduct is effectively communicated to pupils and they are reminded of it frequently within the school. This plays a part in ensuring that behaviour around the school site is excellent. Pupils across the school are polite and considerate in relation to adults and their peers.
- 3.5 Pupils relate well to one another and there is little evidence of bullying. Any issues are dealt with quickly if reported. Pupils in both the prep and the senior school reported to inspectors their sense of ease at being in the school: "we don't do bullying here" was the comment of one pupil. The well-organised supervision at playtimes ensures pupils are safe when in the school playgrounds.
- 3.6 Appropriate child protection policies are in place and staff, including non-teaching staff, have recently undergone training. Two members of staff act as child protection officers and have received training, and one of the school governors is also a named link governor. Governors carry out an annual review of the effectiveness of the child protection policy. Overall, the measures, along with the policy of close co-ordination with relevant local agencies, ensure that pupils are safe.

- 3.7 The school has effective measures in place to reduce the possibility of hazards and reduce the risk of fire. Suitable arrangements concerning safety in relation to fire and electrical equipment are in place across the school and regular fire drills are carried out and logged. Risk assessments are appropriate for activities in school and for those outside, such as trips abroad. The school has an appropriate policy in place for ensuring access for all pupils, including those with physical disabilities, and for ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils and staff.
- 3.8 The procedures for registration and admissions are appropriate. The school has effective systems for dealing with pupils who are late or absent. The level of attendance among the pupils is good.
- 3.9 There is good provision for the medical care of pupils by the school nurse who is highly respected and well informed on medical matters concerning school-age pupils. The medical room provides for sick pupils and appropriate care is taken of medicines that pupils bring to school. Her participation in the planning and delivery of the PSHE programme contributes helpfully to a focus on healthy living in the school. Arrangements for first aid, both on the main school site and at sports grounds, are good.
- 3.10 School meals are based on a healthy diet and are enjoyed by the pupils, although the contents of vending machines did not reflect the healthy eating policy of the school as a whole.
- 3.11 The health and safety committee is chaired by the bursar and has appropriate representatives from the prep and the senior school. The school site is secure and the entry keypads on all buildings were noted to be properly used by pupils and staff.
- 3.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

### **The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community**

- 3.13 The school has outstanding links with parents and the community. Parents strongly support what the school offers their children. This is in line with parents' feelings at the time of the previous report. The partnership is especially strong in the prep, where parents have ready access to staff at the beginning and end of the school day, and also is an important element in the senior school which recognises in its own evaluation the need to work closely with parents who are key partners in their children's education. Parents' responses to their pre-inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive, though a very small number raised the issue of limited support for pupils with LDD. Inspectors found this to be the case, though also recognised that teachers worked hard and with some success to help such pupils keep pace with their peers.
- 3.14 Communication with parents keeps them well informed about their children's education. The school produces helpful handbooks for parents for each different stage of schooling. These are supplemented by diaries of events and regular bulletins. The school magazine 'In Focus' is also a useful source of information. In the senior school and in Years 5 and 6 in the prep, pupils' homework diaries also provide useful information for parents, keep them up-to-date with the work their children are doing, and when dealt with conscientiously are a key link with the school. The school website is another effective and well-used means of communication. It is regularly updated, easy to access and has a great deal of relevant information for parents.

- 3.15 The school provides parents with helpful written reports at appropriate times of the year. The reports indicate pupils' strengths and weaknesses in the subjects they study and how well they are responding to the school's pastoral and social provision. They help parents to know how to support their children and also encourage them to make a response. In addition, the school issues half-termly grade cards which monitor pupils' progress and help both the school and parents to intervene if a pupil is not performing as well as expected. The prep holds two parents' consultation evenings to keep parents well informed about their children's progress. The senior school holds one which is supplemented by additional meetings when pupils are choosing options and making choices.
- 3.16 The school respects parents' views and feelings, as demonstrated by the public meetings held regarding the proposed change in status of the school from a single sex to a co-educational school.
- 3.17 Parents are invited to support the school where they can. They make an effective contribution, helping with school productions, supporting teams and, when asked, accompanying pupils on visits. Form assemblies in the prep school are well attended by parents. The thriving parents' association runs a number of high profile events, such as the Christmas bazaar, and raises a good deal of money for the school.
- 3.18 The school has a clear and appropriate complaints policy and handles complaints from parents in line with its procedures. The access to staff and the headmistress in the prep helps to deal with issues quickly and without the need for parents to lodge a formal complaint. Parents appreciate this. In the senior school, the new pastoral structure and the availability of the headmaster to meet with parents who have worries work well. Almost all the parents who responded to the questionnaire expressed satisfaction with the way complaints were handled.
- 3.19 The school has many positive links with the wider community, both local as well as communities in other parts of the world. The school is very pro-active in linking up with activities in the local area and using local expertise, as demonstrated by pupils being coached by the coaching staff of Tranmere Rovers football team. The school makes good use of local facilities, taking pupils on visits to nearby places of interest such as the Eastham Country Park, which enhance pupils' education and aid their personal development. There are also regular visits for pupils to local theatres from the prep and the senior school, which take in theatres in Liverpool, Manchester and Chester. The school also goes out to join with the local community. The choral society has performed in the Philharmonic Hall in Liverpool and the chapel choir in Salisbury Cathedral for instance, and the school's 'science in the community' project takes science to a number of primary schools in the Wirral. The opportunity for work experience and involvement in Young Enterprise in the senior school furthers the school's links with the community. Closer at hand, the prep and the senior school have very good curricular links that enhance pupils' education.
- 3.20 The school also shares its facilities with the community who make regular use of the school chapel, and a wide range of holiday courses, well attended by pupils and other local children, are run annually at the school. The school sports hall and playing fields are also used by various local clubs. Further afield, some Year 12 and 13 pupils have been involved in a schools' project in Tanzania and the school is involved in a number of charities, such as the one mentioned previously in the report in relation to Rwanda.
- 3.21 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

## **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 The governance of the school is good. Governors are highly committed and keen that the school should be successful.
- 4.2 The governing body has a sound structure and the responsibilities of its finance and general purposes committee are clearly spelled out. Meetings are held regularly and properly minuted. Individual governors have been chosen to provide the governing body with an appropriate range of talents and professional expertise that can effectively support the school. The headmaster appreciates the expertise, support and guidance available from the governing body as does the headmistress of the prep. For their part, the governors feel that they are kept very well informed about issues and events in the school.
- 4.3 The governors have a thorough awareness of their responsibilities, demonstrated by their leading role in sanctioning the recent decision to make the school fully co-educational. The need for planning and organisation to meet this change is taking up much of the governors' time. As a result, the new long term strategic plan required to replace the former plan is still in preparation. Nevertheless, they have ensured that the school has sufficient finances to provide good quality staff and resources for the education of the pupils.
- 4.4 Governors have been keen to have an informed insight into the school's performance. One outcome of this was a recent report based on a visit to the school by a small group of governors to monitor the quality of provision. They visited classes and spoke to teachers and pupils and their findings were reported back to the governing body. They provided first hand information on curricular planning, pastoral care and the quality of lessons.
- 4.5 The governors have members with delegated responsibility for areas such as child protection and welfare, health and safety. The chair of governors also visits the school regularly and is well known to senior staff. Governors attend a variety of school functions such as concerts, sports fixtures and other events. However, some members of staff, especially in the prep, feel that they have little contact with governors.

### **The Quality of Leadership and Management**

- 4.6 The school is well led and managed, a judgement reached at the time of the last inspection. This is reflected in the high standards achieved by pupils, the outstanding opportunities provided for pupils' personal development, the very strong links with parents and the community, and the outstanding care that the school provides for its pupils. These are the result of the quality of leadership and management shown by the headmaster and the headmistress of the prep.
- 4.7 The headmaster is highly committed and has a clear vision for the school. His willingness to consult and listen and his ability to communicate with colleagues have helped him to recognise both the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The recent governors' review of the school also helped in this. The headmaster's approach is replicated by the headmistress in the prep, who knows the strengths and weaknesses of the prep well. Both are exceptional communicators and there is ample evidence of the intelligent way in which they listen to the concerns of parents, staff and pupils. The headmaster's willingness to listen to the school council and reach reasonable conclusions with regard to their requests, and the rapport that the headmistress of the prep has with parents typify this.

- 4.8 The headmaster is well supported by an effective senior management team in the senior school, which has recently been through a process of restructuring. Early indications are that the new pastoral management system, for instance, is largely effective. Heads of department provide good leadership for their departments but there is diversity in their approaches and few have a systematic or regular approach to monitoring and evaluating their department's provision or analysing its needs. For example, not all have a departmental development plan. However, new initiatives, such as departmental audits and a bidding system for resources, are proving to be useful tools in increasing accountability at head of department level.
- 4.9 The hard working headmistress of the prep, who is a member of the school's senior management team, does not have a senior management structure within the prep school to support her. As a consequence, she has a considerable number of senior management responsibilities, which she carries out well, but which result in other members of staff not being helped to prepare for more senior positions. She is well supported by subject leaders. They lead their subjects effectively, relying on informal contact with colleagues to ensure that planning and teaching are of good quality.
- 4.10 The senior management and the governors have worked hard and successfully to ensure that the school is well staffed with good quality teachers, a policy that is helping the school achieve its aims. The appointment of an assistant head to oversee staff development in the senior school is a recent and positive initiative in this respect. The system of professional review and increased opportunities for in-service training in the prep and the senior school are helping to sustain the quality of teaching, though the headmaster knows that there is still a way to go before all teachers give pupils sufficient freedom to take more responsibility for their work. Statutory matters relating to the recruitment of all employees, and to the induction of newly qualified teachers, are in order.
- 4.11 The school has detailed and clear procedures and policies, well understood by staff and pupils. All policies are up to date, but there is no cycle of review. The school does not have a strategic development plan with clear costings, time frames or regular evaluation.
- 4.12 The bursar and his staff manage the school's finances and staff's needs effectively, ensuring that teachers have appropriate resources. Annual budgeting allows for the different sections of the school to make their needs known and the care with which finances are controlled has meant that the school has been in a position to improve accommodation and resources, for example the number of computers throughout the school. The school has good accommodation and has benefited from new building in recent years. The site is attractive and the playing fields add to the school's good provision.
- 4.13 Ancillary staff provide a high quality service. The school is administered highly effectively.
- 4.14 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.15 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

### Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 The leadership and management of the school are of high quality. The headmaster is well supported by the headmistress of the prep and a committed staff, which contributes to the positive learning ethos. Pupils are very articulate and very good listeners. They grasp new learning quickly, read confidently and produce some good extended writing. They handle number and mathematical problems and concepts well. In the senior school they achieve far above the national average in GCSE and well above at A level. The school fulfils its aim to offer a well-proven route to academic success, seeking to enable pupils to realise their potential and prepare them for later life. The curriculum is broad and balanced and is well supported by the wide range of extra-curricular activities and curricular enhancement afforded by visits to places of educational interest. Pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is outstanding. They have evident self-esteem and positive, secure moral values. Pupils have excellent relationships with their teachers and other pupils, willingly take on responsibility and recognise the importance of contributing to the social good. They have a good understanding of their own culture and that of others. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, and they have an excellent attitude to their studies in lessons. The overall quality of teaching is good and a significant proportion is outstanding. Some exciting lessons were observed. On occasions, it is too didactic and does not do enough to ensure the most able and those with LDD are appropriately challenged. The quality of pastoral care is outstanding. The school has outstanding links with parents and the community. Governors are committed to the school and support it well.
- 5.2 The school has made noticeable improvements since the previous inspection. In the prep, access to the library and the provision of ICT has improved. There are greater opportunities for pupils to be involved in their own research and scientific investigation, though the opportunities for independent work have not yet gone far enough in all areas. Appropriate checks are now carried out on all new staff. In the senior school, the curriculum has been reviewed, ICT provision improved and an appropriate appraisal system introduced. However, the headmaster's vision of the school has yet to be converted into a strategic school development plan which contains time frames for achieving priorities, for evaluating their success and their likely costs. The roles and responsibilities of senior management have been reassessed and significant changes made throughout the system. There is still some way to go, however, before the school has management structures fully suited to its needs, especially in the prep.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

## **Next Steps**

- 5.4 In order to continue the good improvement already achieved, the school should ensure that:
1. management structures designed to meet the school's needs, for example those of the prep, are created;
  2. a whole-school development plan with costings, a time frame within which the priorities will be achieved and indications as to how success will be evaluated, is drawn up;
  3. a more appropriate system for supporting pupils with LDD and those who are gifted and talented, is created, and those teachers who over rely on didactic teaching are helped to develop teaching methods suited to the needs of pupils across the ability range.
- 5.5 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

## 6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

### List of Inspectors

Mr Terry Dillon	Reporting Inspector
Mr Brian Melia	Head, IAPS junior school
Mrs Ann Richards	Head, GSA pre-prep school
Mr Adrian Downie	Head, IAPS junior school
Dr John Newton	Head, HMC school
Mr Edward Elliott	Deputy Head, HMC school
Mr James Fowler	Head, HMC school
Mr Barry Hughes	Head, HMC school
Mrs Sue Clarke	Assistant Head, HMC school