



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ST HELEN AND ST KATHARINE

INTEGRATED INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

St Helen and St Katharine

Full Name of School	St Helen and St Katharine	
DfE Number	931/6096	
Registered Charity Number	286892	
Address	St Helen and St Katharine Faringdon Road Abingdon Oxfordshire OX14 1BE	
Telephone Number	01235 520173	
Fax Number	01235 532934	
Email Address	info@shsk.org.uk	
Head	Miss Rowan Edbrooke	
Chair of Governors	Miss Jane Cranston	
Age Range	9 to 18	
Total Number of Pupils	702	
Gender of Pupils	Girls	
Numbers by Age	9-11:	32
	11-18:	670
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	702
Inspection dates	08 Oct 2013 to 11 Oct 2013	

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in February 2010.

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.

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 and a second governor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited 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

Mrs Maureen Bradley	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Deborah Leonard	Team Inspector (Headmistress, GSA school)
Miss Kate Mitchell	Team Inspector (Headmistress, GSA school)
Mrs Catherine Jawaheer	Team Inspector (Headmistress, GSA school)
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Mr Paul Vanni	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, GSA school)
Mrs Judith Gregory	Team Inspector (Former Deputy Head, IAPS school)
Mr Tim Jenkins	Team Inspector (Head of Department, HMC school)

CONTENTS

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

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 St Helen and St Katharine is a selective day school for girls aged 9 to 18. The school is located on the edge of the town of Abingdon in Oxfordshire on a campus of Edwardian and modern buildings set in extensive grounds. St Helen's School was founded in Abingdon in 1903 and merged with St Katharine's of Wantage in 1937. The junior department comprises Years 5 and 6 and was opened in 1990 with Year 6, and in 1995 with Year 5. Founded on Christian values, the school aims to enable every girl to discover and develop her own strengths. It seeks to encourage the aspiration to achieve both academically and beyond the classroom and to develop the self-belief and confidence that will equip the girls for life. The school is administered by a board of governors.
- 1.2 The school provides education for 702 pupils including 32 in the junior department and 174 in the sixth form. Although a Christian foundation the school welcomes pupils of all faiths and parents are predominantly from a white British background with a wide range of professional backgrounds. Pupils travel to the school from a wide catchment area across Oxfordshire and the surrounding counties.
- 1.3 The ability profile of the school is above the national average with over half of pupils in the senior school having ability that is well above average. The pupils' attainment on entry to the junior department is generally above the national average. Most pupils transfer from the juniors to the senior school. On leaving the school from the sixth form, most girls go on to UK universities. The school has identified 13 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and a range of support is available to 11 pupils depending on their needs. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. There is only one pupil in the school with English as an Additional Language (EAL), who does not require any support for her English.
- 1.4 Since the previous inspection the school has enlarged its sixth-form centre and kitchen and dining area and opened a new science laboratory, library cafe, art studio and pick up/drop off area. New floodlit sports facilities have been provided and building has started on a new science centre. The leadership team has been re-structured and new posts have been created.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 The pupils' achievement is excellent. The school is highly successful in its aim to promote excellent levels of achievement and learning across all age groups both in academic work and in extra-curricular activity. As a result of a stimulating and challenging curriculum, and teaching that is often outstanding, pupils attain excellent and sometimes exceptional success in public examinations and in the many creative, physical and intellectual pursuits provided to extend their strengths and talents. The levels of attainment are often beyond those expected for the pupils' ages, which indicate high levels of progress being made. Pupils with SEND receive excellent support and achieve in line with their peers. Pupils throughout the school display outstanding attitudes to learning. Their ambition and motivation is reflected in their willingness and desire to avail themselves as widely as possible of the opportunities at school. Their mutual support for each other and their close working relationship with their teachers promote a strong work ethic and an intellectually stimulating environment.
- 2.2 The personal development of all pupils is excellent and is a reflection of the importance expressed by the school that the individual must always be at the centre of learning. During their time in school pupils develop high self-esteem and confidence which, combined with strong moral values, prepares them well for their future. The strong sense of community in school promotes excellent social and spiritual development through pupils sharing in special moments together; celebrating each other's success, and taking on responsibility to help others. Their awareness of other cultures is well developed through their learning and through cultural visits within the country and abroad. A strong pastoral system and excellent procedures for safeguarding, welfare, health and safety provide a safe and secure environment for pupils to thrive.
- 2.3 The quality of governance, leadership and management is excellent. The school is fulfilling its ambitious aims through focused and committed leadership, supported by governors who share their vision. Governors with a wide range of experience provide strong oversight over their legal responsibilities and, through careful financial planning, have provided high-quality buildings and resources. Governors and senior leaders work together to ensure strategic development plans are thorough. Since the previous inspection the senior leadership and management team have made considerable progress in improving teaching and learning, enriching the curriculum and promoting the personal development of the pupils. The quality of links with parents is excellent. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses parents were overwhelmingly supportive of the quality of educational provision and management. The school has responded effectively to the recommendations made in the previous inspection report of 2010 to improve monitoring and assessment procedures, departmental development planning and participation in sporting activities.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2013.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Encourage teachers to widen their methodology so that good lessons are turned into excellent ones that inspire and challenge all pupils.
2. Ensure there is a consistency of practice across the work of all middle management.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievement and learning is excellent.
- 3.2 The pupils demonstrate high levels of knowledge, advanced understanding and excellent skills in all they do. Across all ages, subjects and activities pupils receive an excellent education in accordance with the school's aim to 'enable every girl to discover and develop her own strengths and abilities'. Their excellent achievements and progress are substantiated by high levels of success in public examination results and in extra-curricular activities. Pupils with SEND achieve the same high levels as their peers and the most able pupils frequently show exceptional levels of success in their academic work, national competitions and creative exhibitions and performances.
- 3.3 Pupils throughout the school from Year 5 to the sixth form produce work of outstanding quality and presentation. Logical thinking processes, perceptive questioning and skills of reasoning and analysis are particular strengths. Literacy and linguistic appreciation is excellent. Creative writing is especially strong and considerable success is achieved in national essay and poetry competitions. Pupils are frequently successful in county, regional and national competitions in debating and in Latin and Greek reading. Pupils' scientific knowledge is exceptionally well developed and with their excellent numeracy skills and understanding they frequently gain success in science olympiads and mathematic challenges. Many sixth-form pupils successfully complete a range of science courses in the Open University Young Applicants in School Scheme. This strength in higher order scientific and numerical knowledge is demonstrated across all areas of the curriculum and, combined with competency in information and communication technology (ICT), is used effectively to progress their learning.
- 3.4 Pupils of all ages combine their achievements in the curriculum with their considerable success in extra-curricular activities. Inspiring performances in music, dance and drama show excellent, and sometimes exceptional, levels of creativity. In music large numbers of pupils are successful in achieving high examination grades in many instruments. Displays of technology, art and ceramic work around the school are evidence of their talents and achievements in this area. Pupils' physical skills are particularly impressive and representation at county, regional and national level can be found in many sports. There are high levels of participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) with 11 pupils going on to complete the gold award in 2012. Older pupils achieve success each year in the Young Enterprise scheme. Sixth-formers consistently gain places at universities in the UK with the highest entry requirements.
- 3.5 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2010 to 2012. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Results at GCSE have been excellent in relation to the national average for pupils in maintained schools and were exceptional in 2011. On average, over the three years, 90 per cent of all grades were A* or A. Results are consistently above the average for pupils in maintained selective schools. Results at IGCSE are higher than world-wide and UK averages with more than 90 per cent of grades being achieved at A* or A. Results in 2013 for GCSE and IGCSE indicate exceptional attainment; the proportion of grades at A or A* reached over 90 per cent.

- 3.6 A-level results overall have been exceptional in relation to the national average for pupils in maintained schools and well above the national average for pupils in maintained selective schools. On average 95 per cent of all grades are achieved at A* to B. Results in 2012 were slightly lower than in previous years, but were well above the national average for pupils in maintained schools, and above the national average for pupils in maintained selective schools. The 2013 results indicate exceptional achievement again with 80 per cent of all grades achieved at A* or A.
- 3.7 The level of attainment at IGCSE and A level, and nationally standardised measures of progress that are available, indicate that pupils make progress that is high in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. These results, considered alongside the pupils' work and achievement in lessons, indicate that they make excellent progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. Analysis of achievement shows no significant difference between pupils with SEND, who make excellent progress in relation to their starting point. Pupils who are designated as most able have also demonstrated good progress.
- 3.8 Pupils throughout the school display outstanding attitudes to learning. They work co-operatively with their teachers and enjoy being engaged in high-quality discussion and debate. They are intellectually curious, extremely motivated and have high aspirations both inside and outside the classroom, and they are mutually supportive of each other in pursuit of their goals.

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

- 3.9 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.10 Since the previous inspection the curriculum has been reviewed and improved and the recommendations have been put in place to achieve more breadth, balance and challenge. There has also been adjustment in some years to create smaller teaching groups in core subjects to enhance pupils' learning. The current curriculum is suitable for all ages, abilities and needs and is highly successful in meeting the school's aim to recognise that every pupil is different and will have a unique combination of interests, ability and aspiration. The majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire appreciated the breadth of subjects and experiences offered to their children, including the vast range of extra-curricular activities.
- 3.11 The curriculum covers all areas of learning effectively. Appropriate measures have been taken to promote academic rigour and intellectual challenge, supported by suitable schemes of work. In the junior department, the time allocated to each subject is appropriate and there is strong focus on studying the core skills of English and mathematics. Pupils benefit from specialist teaching in areas such as languages, sport, art and music. The curriculum lays strong foundations for future learning and provides an excellent transition to the demands of senior school life. In addition, access to the specialist facilities of the senior school greatly enhances the junior curriculum, and provides further challenge and aspiration.
- 3.12 On entry to Year 7 the addition of learning skills provides an excellent springboard for the academic rigour to come. Separate sciences are taught from Year 7 and the teaching of classical education, including Greek, has been extended. The creative curriculum in Year 9 now provides continuity through to the choice of examination subjects at GCSE. Most pupils at IGCSE and A level can study their preferred choice of subjects, reflecting the flexibility within the school. Sixth-form pupils

appreciate the opportunities that teaching links with a local school have allowed them in extending subject choices and intellectual activities. Critical thinking in the sixth form has been introduced to provide further challenge. Preparation for life beyond school is provided through an excellent careers course. This includes a vibrant work experience programme in Years 11 and 12 and a worthwhile community service programme. Throughout the school there are appropriate schemes of work for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) which are complemented by cross-curricular work and form time discussions.

- 3.13 Excellent provision is made for the small number of girls who require extra learning support to help them prepare for their needs. Extension work was on offer in many lessons observed and this continues to be embedded across the full range of subjects at both junior and senior level.
- 3.14 There is an excellent programme of activities and trips available beyond the classroom. The extra-curricular programme caters for all pupils, furthering opportunities, widening experiences and developing and enhancing skills. Pupils are actively encouraged to choose from, and participate in, many different sports both for recreation and competition. The school has increased overall participation levels in sporting activities and teams for all ages, as recommended in the previous report. Performance opportunities such as choral societies and jazz groups are available and numerous individual music lessons take place each week. Drama and debating are popular and large numbers of pupils participate in productions and competitions. The school is particularly proud of the provision for DofE participation to gold level. Clubs such as sanskrit, code breaking and literary societies inspire pupils to extend their thinking and to develop confidence. A large number of trips and excursions take place each year both locally and abroad to widen experiences.
- 3.15 The curriculum is well supported by excellent resources and facilities. The recently built library is an inviting environment for work and study and an outstanding resource in supporting independent learning. The provision for ICT is being developed across the school and is a valuable addition to learning in many subjects.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.16 The contribution of teaching is excellent.
- 3.17 Through excellent teaching both in and beyond the classroom the school is highly successful in meeting its aim to promote the highest quality of teaching to maximise the progress of pupils of all abilities across all age groups.
- 3.18 Throughout the inspection teaching was excellent in more than half of the lessons observed and on only a few occasions did it fall below a good standard. The majority of lessons have good pace and academic rigour and fully engaged the pupils' interest in the work. In most teaching, explanations are detailed and based on strong subject knowledge. The teachers' ability to give clear explanations of complex ideas enables the pupils to progress rapidly to an understanding of even the most demanding topics. This is especially true of work in the sixth form where the teaching often makes tricky topics easy to understand. Pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively and they benefit from sharing their ideas and the mutual support and encouragement they gave to each other.
- 3.19 Time is used effectively and good use of initial activities ensures that lessons have a brisk start. Teaching is, in almost all cases, well planned with a broad variety of tasks and styles, which captures pupils' imaginations well. The most successful

lessons are characterised by assiduous preparation, ensuring that pupils were on task and fully challenged throughout the lesson. The excellent rapport between staff and pupils, and between the pupils themselves, enables them to enjoy their learning. Teaching encourages very good behaviour which contributes significantly to the pupils' progress. In some lessons opportunities to encourage independent learning are sometimes missed and in the less successful lessons, low expectations lead to too much direction from the teacher, inhibiting pupils' active involvement. In some lessons the pupils are not always given the opportunity to take risks with their learning and pursue greater challenge. This prevents some pupils from achieving the exceptional levels of achievement of which they are capable.

- 3.20 Teaching is adapted to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND, who are able to feel comfortable working within the same parameters as their peers. Successful targeted support was seen in a number of lessons observed. The most able pupils are well catered for, with teaching providing breadth and extension work within and beyond the subject to develop learning. Teaching benefits from a wide range of resources which are used effectively. ICT is used successfully in many subjects and by pupils with SEND to support their understanding and learning.
- 3.21 The school has responded positively to the recommendation made in the previous report to establish a fully systematic procedure for monitoring and assessing pupils' progress to help to ensure that marking and reporting focus consistently on driving improvement. A new whole-school assessment system has been developed. The overall quality of marking and assessment is good. Marking is usually thorough and detailed, providing constructive and informative feedback. Pupils are provided with clearly focused advice which helps them to understand what they must do to achieve higher standards. In the best practice pupils are guided to find for themselves the most effective means to improve and are involved in evaluating their own work and that of their peers. In a few cases, marking is more cursory and lacking guidance. The effective marking and oral feedback in the junior department helps pupils gain a thorough understanding of the criteria for success. Effective use is made of data to plan future learning, though this is not consistently applied across all departments. A focus on performance management, lesson observations, and the formation of the Learning Working Group have stimulated professional dialogue about teaching which is having a positive impact in the classroom.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 As a result of the extremely successful fulfilment of the school's aim to give pupils the opportunity to develop as individuals their personal development is excellent. Upon leaving school they have gained the confidence to say 'this is me' and have the self-esteem and self-belief necessary to make a valuable contribution to the outside world.
- 4.3 The pupils' spiritual development is excellent. Inspirational moments in lessons, creative work, assemblies and chapel develop their emotional maturity and an appreciation of the beauty of life. Their enjoyment of music and drama is evident and allows them to explore their emotions. This was seen during chapel and in a Year 5 and 6 singing lesson which provided moments of pure joy and happiness amongst the class. The pupils take the opportunities that are provided for quiet reflection within the school. Chapel and assembly are important times in the school week and pupils' contributions are confident and respectful of each other. The gardens and the individual reflective spaces at the rear of the chapel provide a calming environment for pupils to have moments of peace. As a result the pupils develop a strong sense of self-awareness, with good values and a respect for the world around them.
- 4.4 Pupils' moral development is excellent. They demonstrate uplifting moral standards and have a keen understanding of what is right and wrong both in school and the outside community. They are very supportive of each other and seek fairness and justice within the school and in their relationships. This is extended by their interest in exploring justice and sensitive issues in the wider world. They grow in understanding of the law and the different views held in the world as they debate issues such as child abuse and the treatment of women. Due to the respect showed to them by the adults in school they feel valued and have excellent role models on which to base their standards of behaviour. They are always courteous and polite and in responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all parents expressed the view that the school achieves high standards of behaviour. Pupils demonstrate an excellent sense of responsibility and are proud to take on the many opportunities available from head girl to friendship box monitor in Year 5.
- 4.5 Pupils demonstrate excellent social development. A friendly and welcoming atmosphere pervades the school, exemplified by the smiles, helpfulness and polite manner displayed by the pupils. They have a good understanding of how to be sensitive around others and demonstrate high levels of emotional maturity in their interactions with each other and with adults. Pupils of all ages are active members of the community, willingly assuming roles of service. Their support of a wide range of charitable events reflects their understanding of the needs of others and inequality in society. Senior pupils participate in the community service programme which allows them to make a valuable contribution to the quality of life within the community and to develop views and opinions on the issues that arise, from caring for the elderly to helping toddlers with their creative play. They gain a valuable insight into the business world through their involvement in Young Enterprise activities. Pupils understand the principles of democracy and have a sound understanding of how the British political system influences society.

4.6 The pupils' awareness of other cultures is excellent and is enhanced by the ease with which they happily discuss their own different backgrounds. An understanding of global cultural awareness develops as they discuss events and issues in the classroom across all of their subjects and activities. Excursions, both local and abroad, such as the recent art trips to Cornwall and Madrid, as well as the drama tour to Japan, have enhanced the pupils' cultural experiences and understanding. They appreciate that their teachers create a culture which engenders respect and consideration for others, and promotes an appreciation of everyone's needs and differences.

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

4.7 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.

4.8 Pastoral care is a considerable strength of the school and meets its aims to provide a caring environment offering support and encouragement to pupils as well as celebrating their successes and achievements. Ensuring excellent pastoral care is the responsibility of all staff, who work together to form a comprehensive network of support. Procedures and lines of responsibility are clear. This was frequently acknowledged by pupils who expressed that they feel part of a warm and friendly community. The school develops a strong sense of identity and belonging among pupils for whom there are many opportunities to bond with one another, for example the Year 9 chateau trip to France. Pupils have a heavy academic and extra-curricular workload but teachers help pupils to manage their time and prioritise effectively. The school operates a colour-coded dot system of green, amber and red dots which allows pupils to indicate how they are feeling about their life load. Teachers respond to this sensitively.

4.9 Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. Pupils feel that they are treated maturely, and the atmosphere throughout the school is one of friendly respect. Pupils reported at interviews that there are many staff they would turn to for advice or if they have a concern. The school's behaviour and sanctions policy has recently been reviewed in consultation with the school council and the rare instances of bad behaviour are dealt with swiftly and effectively. In pre-inspection questionnaire responses a small minority of pupils felt that rewards and sanctions were not always applied consistently. Inspection evidence from pupil interviews found this related to how staff respond to homework and some inconsistency was noted across departments.

4.10 Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and exceptionally high-quality menus are offered every day. A broad range of dietary requirements is catered for. The curriculum programmes, and the many sports activities on offer, give pupils the opportunity to develop a healthy respect for exercise and an understanding of its importance. An appropriate PSHCE programme seeks to encourage safety, independence and resilience, and pupils develop an awareness of the dangers of such things as alcohol and drugs.

4.11 Pupils are frequently made aware of the school's anti-bullying policy, which is reinforced in assemblies and through participation in anti-bullying week. Pupil interviews indicated that they are not aware of any instances of bullying in the school and know who to turn to in the event of suspected bullying. A clear policy including information on cyber-bullying is understood and implemented by staff. Records regarding rare bullying incidents are carefully maintained and show that concerns have been handled swiftly and resolved.

- 4.12 In pre-inspection questionnaire responses a small minority of pupils reported that the school doesn't seek or respond to their opinions. The inspection team found that pupils have a strong voice, particularly through the school council, which meets every two weeks and is effective in representing the views of the pupil body to staff. Staff feedback to pupils has improved considerably since the last inspection. Pupils reported that they feel able to talk to their teachers about issues and ideas for the school and there is also a suggestion box available to them.

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

- 4.13 The contribution of the arrangements for welfare, health and safety throughout the school is excellent.
- 4.14 The school is very effective in providing a safe environment in which pupils can thrive and feel secure and this contributes considerably to their excellent personal development. There are clear policies and effective procedures to promote pupils' welfare which are reviewed annually by members of the management team and by the governing body. Particular attention is paid to safeguarding and child protection. Staff, volunteers and governors are suitably trained in child protection procedures including new staff through their induction training. Governors with individual responsibility for safe recruitment and child protection monitor their implementation carefully throughout the year by visiting the school for unannounced checks. Any concerns regarding the welfare of pupils are recorded carefully and followed up rigorously in line with school policy.
- 4.15 Health and safety matters are efficiently organised and managed. A health and safety working party meets once a month to monitor any issues or concerns. It reports directly to the health and safety committee, which provides thorough oversight of procedures and issues the governors with reports each term. The bursar's office and maintenance management work closely together to ensure that risk assessments are completed appropriately and that all necessary measures to reduce risk from hazards have been taken. A fire risk assessment has recently been undertaken and some minor issues were raised and are being attended to. The required fire prevention procedures are in place and equipment is tested regularly. The school has an appropriate programme of planned fire drills which are fully evaluated.
- 4.16 Pupils benefit from a comfortable medical centre run by well-qualified nurses who are valued for their contribution to the pastoral care of the pupils. The centre provides a focus for support beyond everyday medical issues. Records are stored securely and carefully maintained by the nursing staff. Communication of health matters is efficient and essential information is distributed wisely. A number of staff are trained in first aid. The school has good access for pupils with restricted mobility and a suitable plan to improve educational access for pupils with SEND. Admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained and stored.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is excellent.
- 5.2 Governors provide strong support for the school's aims to encourage highly aspirational achievement both academically and beyond the classroom, and to enable every pupil to develop personally through providing opportunities and facilities to help them discover their talents and strengths. The pupils' excellent achievement and personal development has been promoted by the governors' shared ambition for the school and their strategic planning to realise this vision.
- 5.3 The governing body is well qualified and has appropriate skills which are used effectively. Some governors bring many years of valuable experience with the school and understand the importance of its traditions, and this is complemented by careful recruitment of new members bringing fresh ideas and experience. The practical involvement of governors in particular areas and through specific committees has been highly effective in improving standards and facilities.
- 5.4 The academic committee has ensured that a clear strategy set within an actively managed development plan has raised educational standards since the previous inspection. Excellent support for the initiatives of the senior leadership and management team, and the setting of challenging school targets, has improved teaching and learning across the curriculum and provided pupils with an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. The experienced finance and building development committees are highly effective in overseeing an ambitious building development programme.
- 5.5 The chair of governors maintains good communication with the head teacher and is made aware of concerns and developments. Regular presentations to governors by staff provide current information about educational direction and the school's activities. Governors have a strong oversight of those areas where they have legal responsibilities. The welfare, staff recruitment, and health and safety arrangements are regularly reviewed and monitored by individual governors and then assessed by the full governing body. An annual review of safeguarding measures is undertaken by all governors. They have ensured that the regulatory failing and recommendations of the previous report have been fully addressed.

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

- 5.6 The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, is excellent.
- 5.7 Through committed and focused leadership and management the school is successfully achieving its ambitious aims to ensure that every pupil achieves success so that she can believe in herself, her talents and her abilities. Since the previous inspection the senior leadership and management team have made considerable progress in improving teaching and learning, enriching the curriculum and promoting the personal development of the pupils. The team is particularly successful in conveying to the staff and pupils the vision for the school to be a centre of excellence, but with the interests of each individual pupil being retained at the heart of all that they do. Almost all parents answering the pre-inspection

questionnaire said they had confidence in the leadership and management of the school.

- 5.8 A new leadership structure has ensured that responsibility for key areas has been more clearly defined. Priorities to enable successful and continuous development of the school are considered carefully in strategic planning. Initiatives and projects are well monitored, as recommended in the previous report. The active involvement of teachers in a learning working group and an ICT development group has ensured that staff feel engaged in any initiatives taking place. High expectations, focused lesson observations and detailed appraisals with targets for improvement, are increasing the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. The extension of the extra-curricular programme has been especially appreciated and has made a significant impact on the personal development of pupils. Training is generous in its funding and is focused on professional development of the individual and the needs of the school.
- 5.9 The structures for pastoral care are highly effective and clear pastoral and welfare policies are implemented thoroughly. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are comprehensive. Checking procedures to ensure the suitability of staff, volunteers and governors to work with children are secure. Effective communication between all sections of the school ensures that any concerns about pupils are handled and resolved quickly.
- 5.10 Middle management positions provide many layers of responsibility and provide a number of people who pupils can turn to with a concern or issue. They maintain oversight of the pupils' progress and personal development. All departments have improved their development planning, highlighting targets for success as recommended in the previous report. In some departments there is a considerable amount of effective staff development, sharing of good practice and academic monitoring. This is not, however, consistent across all subject departments and this has an impact on the quality of teaching in the classroom.
- 5.11 The school appoints staff of high quality, both teaching and non-teaching, and job descriptions are clear. Non-teaching staff are integrated fully into the school community and feel valued. They appreciate that their work creates an excellent learning environment for the pupils. Management of the estate is efficient and a recent increase in personnel support has ensured that all matters relating to the health and safety of pupils is assured.
- 5.12 The quality of links between the school and parents is excellent. The school fulfils its aim to establish close relationships with parents and provide informative and professional communications to current and prospective parents. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents express extremely high levels of satisfaction with the school's provision for their children's education. The overwhelming majority of parents expressed approval for their children's progress and the support offered. There were no areas of concern raised by significant numbers of parents. An appropriate complaints procedure is maintained, and correctly implemented when necessary. Parents report that the school handles any concerns promptly and with care.
- 5.13 The school welcomes and supports parental involvement and values the hard work and dedication of the parents' association. Parents have good opportunities to be actively involved in the work of the school, for example manning the café on open

days so that present parents have direct contact with prospective parents. They also arrange social functions for the parents, such as a ball and a quiz night.

- 5.14 Information provided to parents of pupils and prospective pupils about the school is extensive and available through the prospectus and website, as well as other publications such as *'Lines'*, the termly newsletter, and *'Beyond'*, which has detailed information about extra-curricular activities. The website and parents' portal also give access to a wide range of information, including guidance on sixth-form application to university, which helps foster the very positive relationship between parents and the school.
- 5.15 Each half term parents receive information about their daughter's work. This is either a grade report, short report, full report or parents' evening. Reports are clear, detailed and targeted. The reporting process focuses consistently on driving improvements.

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