

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

INSPECTION OF

THE SCHOOL OF ST HELEN AND ST KATHARINE

By the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

On

April 24th – 27th, 2006

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

The School of St Helen and St Katharine

Full Name of the School	The School of St Helen and St Katharine
DfES Number	931/6096
Registered Charity Number	286892
Address	Faringdon Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1BE
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Headmistress	Mrs Cynthia Hall
Chair of Governors	Miss Jane Cranston
Age Range	9-18
Gender	Girls
Inspection Dates	April 24th – 27th, 2006

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 has 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.

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 The School of St Helen and St Katharine was founded in 1903 to provide a Christian education for girls in the Abingdon area.
- 1.2 It is situated on the outskirts of Abingdon in distinctive red-brick buildings, a tasteful blend of those dating from the beginning of the last century and others of recent date. The school site is enhanced by fruit trees and beech hedges. Particularly attractive features are the large quadrangle, the garden and the orchard. The sports fields are adjacent. The 1923 chapel, inscribed with the words of the divine revelation to the Christian emperor Constantine (*in hoc signo vinces*), bears witness to the school's Christian foundation and the importance of St Helen, the emperor's mother. The junior department was opened in 1990 to allow early entry to the school for parents who have chosen St Helen's as a secondary school for their daughters. The original point of entry was Year 6 and Year 5 was added in 1995. Since the time of the last inspection, in spring 2000, the size of the school has increased by some 40 pupils and further building development has continued, including a language learning centre, a performing arts block and a new sports hall.
- 1.3 The school has links with two boys' schools in the area: Radley College and Abingdon School. With Radley College, debates and a joint annual conference are held for older pupils. Radley College also invites girls to take part in its plays. Abingdon School is a partner in many St Helen's drama productions. It also shares a joint choral society with St Helen's and boys and girls from the two schools are taught together for selected subjects in the sixth form.
- 1.4 The total number of girls is 631; 34 in the junior section (Years 5 and 6), 422 in the upper section (Years 7 to 11) and 175 students in the sixth form (Years 12 and 13). Few pupils are of ethnic minority origin, but there are 18 pupils for whom English is not their principal language; one of these receives special support. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs, although 32 pupils have been identified as requiring some kind of learning support. Most commonly this is related to dyslexia.
- 1.5 The school has a selective entry at 9+, 10+ and 11+, based on academic potential and ability judged by interview and tests in English and mathematics. Further pupils are admitted at 13+ using similar criteria, with the addition of tests in non-verbal reasoning and a modern foreign language. Students are admitted to the sixth form on the strength of their previous GCSE results. On leaving the school from Year 13, almost all students proceed to university, mostly securing their first choice. In 2005, 20 girls, a quarter of the year group, obtained offers of places at Oxford or Cambridge.
- 1.6 In ability, most of the pupils accepted are well above the national average as measured by standardised tests taken in Year 7. If the pupils performed in line with their abilities, their results would be well above average, and the examination achievement of those in the senior department would be similar to that in maintained selective schools.
- 1.7 The school's mission statement is as follows; 'We aim to develop the individual talents and strengths of all pupils within a community based on Christian values, so that they may grow in confidence, increase their awareness of the moral, social and spiritual dimensions of life and achieve high levels of intellectual attainment.'

1.8 The junior department's aims are:

- to stimulate curiosity, interest and enjoyment of learning in an atmosphere in which pupils feel comfortable and keen to participate and staff enjoy teaching;
- to value each individual and encourage pupils to feel the value and worth of others;
- to approach issues of race, religion or ability in ways designed to foster tolerance and insight;
- to work to instil an awareness of the value of learning for each individual, the community and the environment.

1.9 The characteristics of the senior department are given in the prospectus as follows.

- At St Helen's we believe that education should develop the whole person and extend far beyond the formal curriculum.
- Whilst a broad and balanced curriculum is maintained for as long as possible, high achievement in subject specialism is a key strength of the school.
- Whether as solo performer or a stage hand, expressing and communicating ideas through the arts has an enjoyable role to play, cementing friendships and building confidence.
- Careers education and guidance is an integral part of each girl's curriculum from Year 7, and intensified before important choices are made between subjects.
- St Helen's offers intellectually stimulating teaching at the highest levels and a commitment to the development of the individual within a thriving, caring and friendly community.

1.10 National Curriculum 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 (NC) equivalence are shown in the following tables.

Junior Department

School	NC name
Year 5	Year 5
Year 6	Year 6

Senior Department

School	NC name
Lower School	Year 7
	Year 8
Middle School	Year 9
	Year 10
	Year 11
Upper School 1	Year 12
Upper School 2	Year 13

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The school's educational provision is of high quality overall. It successfully fulfils the aim of providing a broad and challenging academic curriculum to enable all girls to obtain high levels of achievement. It provides for the interests and needs of all the pupils. Since the last inspection, notable progress has been made in improving standards in information and communication technology (ICT) and the planning of curricular change, facilitated by the appointment of a second deputy head. The main strengths of the curriculum are the provision of three separate sciences, a rich offering of modern languages, Latin and Greek and an abundant choice of some 25 subjects for study at A level.
- 2.2 The junior department curriculum is well judged, with a suitable emphasis on literacy and numerical skills. The department succeeds in its aim to instil an awareness of the value of learning for each individual, the community and the environment. In the senior department, subject specialism is, as intended, a key strength of the school. However, the curriculum has its relative weaknesses. Restricted time is devoted to practical, creative and aesthetic subjects in Years 7 to 9. For example, continuity of learning is reduced in art and music.
- 2.3 The curriculum contributes to all the necessary areas of education, including languages, mathematics, science, human and social studies and physical, practical, creative and expressive subjects. Throughout the school, the curriculum is enhanced by visits, often vividly recorded on wall displays. They include fieldwork and residential experiences, many abroad, for example, in connection with sport, music, history, geography, French, German, Spanish and Italian. A further dimension is added by the sixth-form lecture programme.
- 2.4 The school's extra-curricular provision is also of high quality, as at the time of the last inspection, and it affords many and varied opportunities for pupils to enrich their education beyond the formal curriculum, in accordance with the school's aims. Participation is extensive. Excellent opportunities are offered in music, drama and sport. In their replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire, pupils and parents much appreciated the extra-curricular programme. Standards were high in most of the activities observed.
- 2.5 An extensive range of musical activities is provided, including many ensembles, some of high calibre. Joint concerts are held with Abingdon School, music groups perform in Europe, and the choir has recently visited Paris and sung in Notre Dame Cathedral. The school has participated in a national music festival. The current drama production is a musical.
- 2.6 Pupils have ample and varied opportunities to be involved in business and the community. A large number are working towards Duke of Edinburgh awards. Others take part in Young Enterprise business ventures, public speaking competitions and voluntary service in the local community. For example, Year 12 students work with disabled children, give support at a day centre for the elderly, help with primary school children, and prepare food and serve at a Christian coffee shop.
- 2.7 A wide range of sporting and cultural activities is available in the lunch-hour and after school, but for some pupils after-school activities are very difficult to attend because of the time at which buses leave the school. Team practices dominate the use of sports facilities and the expertise of staff and pupils maintains the excellent reputation and strong sporting achievements in local and wider competitions, as noted at the time of the last inspection. The physical education department is aware of the need to employ additional sports coaches to

widen the programme and broaden participation, so as to provide sport for those who are keen but not in school teams.

- 2.8 Through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) and careers programmes, pupils are well prepared for the challenges they will meet as teenagers and in their subsequent adult lives. These programmes contribute effectively to the school's aim to develop the whole person and to prepare pupils for the important choices they will make between subjects. From Year 5, the PSHE programme, which includes elements of citizenship, is partly taught by tutors but also benefits from the contribution of specialist speakers. During the inspection, pupils gave creative and imaginative reports which showed how they had furthered their personal development through a recent residential experience. They expressed sophisticated ideas on what they had learnt socially, for example, in teamwork, openness and co-operation. As part of the wide-ranging careers programme, which starts in Year 7, pupils are able to take careers aptitude tests and they have at least a week's work experience in Year 11. Some sixth-form pupils participate in work experience abroad. Valuable advice is given on selecting university courses. The quality of the PSHE and careers programmes has improved significantly since the last inspection.
- 2.9 The special educational needs department makes effective provision for pupils identified as needing learning support. Those with dyslexia, usually very mild by national standards, are given help and allocated additional time in internal and external examinations. All staff are made aware of pupils who need particular assistance and the co-ordinator of learning support gives extra help to pupils, advises staff and maintains liaison with parents and outside agencies. Extra lessons are organised with a specialist teacher by private arrangement. On occasion, the English staff give extra lessons to the few pupils who need them for English as an additional language and resources are available for them in the library. The needs of gifted and talented pupils have been studied in a staff research project supported by a local university, which has improved the school's practice in this area.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.11 In the junior and senior departments, pupils attain high levels of knowledge, skill and understanding both in the subjects they study and in their extra-curricular activities. Pupils make conspicuous progress during their time at the school and are critical and creative in their thinking and in the tasks they undertake. In the various subjects which they study, no significant differences are apparent in the relative progress made by girls of differing ability.
- 2.12 The school fully meets its aim to enable pupils to achieve high standards of intellectual attainment. Their performance in public examinations maintains and in some ways exceeds the levels reached at the time of the last inspection, with results which are well above those for maintained selective schools. Many students do well in the A-level advanced extension award.
- 2.13 With the school's support and encouragement of excellence, individual and group successes are notable in competitions in various sports at county level and beyond, for example, in lacrosse, netball, athletics and swimming, and several pupils are ranked nationally in lacrosse, sailing and squash. Throughout the school, groups of pupils have been involved in acclaimed performances in drama and music. Large numbers of pupils pass practical music examinations, some with outstanding results, and more than half achieve merit or distinction. The school has had considerable success in mathematics challenges, with many pupils winning gold, silver and bronze certificates at junior, intermediate or senior level. A particularly large number of pupils achieve Duke of Edinburgh awards, including 10 gold in

- the last academic year. Groups of students have done well in Young Enterprise business ventures and several pupils have won prizes in Oxfordshire Latin and Greek reading competitions.
- 2.14 From an early stage in the junior department, pupils develop the skills and attitudes necessary for work and study. Their skills in spoken and written language are outstanding. They listen effectively and are clear and fluent in expression. In studying literature, their appreciation and discussion of character, imagery and context are keenly perceptive, as was observed in junior department work on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, middle school work on Dickens' *Great Expectations* and sixth-form work on Euripides' *Hippolytus*.
- 2.15 The pupils apply numerical skills accurately in mathematics and other subjects as necessary, including science, geography and music. In science, pupils exploited mathematics in topics as diverse as capacitors and enzymes. ICT skills are well developed and were, for example, observed in work creating websites and using spreadsheets, but outside ICT lessons the application of these skills is mainly evident in a minority of subjects; for example, geography, English, science and music, and in a recently completed Year 6 mathematics project. Control technology was not observed. The school is aware of the need to continue developments in the use of ICT within other subjects.
- 2.16 In discussion, pupils reason and argue cogently and express themselves confidently. They develop debating skills from an early age. They take notes efficiently and can organise their work with a high degree of independence. For example, pieces of outstanding coursework were seen in English, geography and science. Frequently, however, pupils have less scope to explore topics for themselves.
- 2.17 Pupils study and work very efficiently. They are mutually supportive and work purposefully in groups and pairs, notably so in oral work in modern foreign language classes. Pupils of all ages arrive promptly for lessons; they settle quickly and show enjoyment, perseverance and an exemplary attitude for learning.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.18 The quality of the pupils' personal development is outstanding. The relationships between staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves are characterised by courtesy and friendliness and pupils develop well-founded confidence and self-esteem within a safe, purposeful and principled environment. Even the quieter ones contribute their personal views and beliefs effectively when called upon to do so. The school achieves consummate success in its aim of building a community based on Christian values, and the assemblies and chapel services are central to an atmosphere of respect and discipline among the pupils. From an early stage, creative and imaginative work is produced in a wide variety of subjects, including history and English. For example, junior department pupils contributed perceptive and expressive metaphors in writing a class poem about the Queen. Spiritual and aesthetic sensitivities are apparent in the excellent chapel choir and music ensembles and in extra-curricular activities such as drama. Pupils are clearly happy in the school and speak of it with affection and pride. They respect the staff and are frequently enthused by their teachers' love of learning. As one pupil put it, "We breathe in the ethos and expectations of the school and are keen to live up to them."
- 2.19 The moral development of the pupils is also excellent. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and show respect for the law. They fervently express their own views on moral and ethical questions in subjects such as history, religious studies and the classics. They have a wealth of opportunities to develop mature views on issues such as drug addiction and sexual health and in matters of topical interest. The school has a powerful anti-bullying code and

pupils have designed eye-catching posters in line with its messages. The code of conduct is clearly in evidence. Pupils understand and fully appreciate it, with the result that examples of ill-disciplined behaviour are extremely rare.

- 2.20 The pupils have a mature sense of responsibility and a clear awareness of social issues. Many give expression to a strong social conscience, by supporting causes at home and abroad or engaging in community service by helping with the disabled, the elderly and the young. The junior department pupils stage a performance for senior citizens at Christmas. Throughout the school, the pupils are alive to the needs of others and they raise large sums of money for charity in a wide-ranging programme. Events often centre on St Katharine's Day and on 'home clothes day'.
- 2.21 Prefects have important responsibilities, which they enjoy; for example, in assemblies, 'taster days' for prospective pupils, charity collections, and organising the school ball. Year 12 students discharge various responsibilities, for example, they help with clubs, act as form assistants, prepare the hall for assembly and do duty as 'bus leaders'. Several pupils in each year group take community responsibilities in the school council and older pupils have been elected to the local youth forum. Through PSHE, subjects such as history and the sixth-form general studies programme, pupils gain a well-founded knowledge of public institutions and services. Mock elections take place in school at election times and this also encourages a knowledge and understanding of civic institutions.
- 2.22 Pupils appreciate Western European culture, for example, in art, music and literature, and they show respect for other cultures and religions. In religious studies lessons and elsewhere, they learn about the beliefs and values of faiths other than Christianity and they understand the importance of harmony between different traditions. In the senior department, cultural awareness is enhanced through the many opportunities for visits abroad, and in both departments the school fulfils the aim 'to approach issues of race, religion or ability in ways designed to foster tolerance and insight'.
- 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 As at the time of the last inspection, the school is very successful in its aim to provide intellectually stimulating teaching which enables the pupils, regardless of ability or individual need, to acquire knowledge and increase their understanding to a high level. The teaching fosters exemplary behaviour in an atmosphere in which pupils value and enjoy learning and are keen to expend intellectual, physical and creative effort. The junior department aim 'to stimulate curiosity, interest and enjoyment' is realised throughout the school.
- 2.25 The teaching is well planned and efficient use is made of time, although the range of teaching methods is in some cases limited because it affords relatively few opportunities for independent investigation, except in coursework, extended writing and some junior department assignments. Homework requires pupils to work on their own, but usually within closely circumscribed tasks. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and are well aware of the aptitudes and previous attainment of the pupils. Teaching is enhanced by effective use of a range of good quality resources.
- 2.26 In the relatively small but significant proportion of outstanding teaching, the qualities were thorough planning, variety, imagination, opportunities for the pupils to demonstrate their learning, meticulous organisation, a close match of tasks to ability, lucid explanations, a

profound knowledge of the subject and even teaching which was steeped in scholarship. By contrast, the small minority of lessons which were only satisfactory were short of qualities such as briskness of working, the demand of the tasks set, the clarity of instructions, the direct involvement of pupils or noticeable enthusiasm.

- 2.27 Throughout the school, assessment procedures are satisfactory and the information from regular assessment is used to plan suitable tasks in subsequent work. Pupils are clear that they understand the different marking systems in use in different subjects. Most marking is strongly supportive and gives clear credit for the merit in pupils' work. However, the quality of marking varies in the extent to which it helps pupils to improve their performance. The school is aware that further progress is needed in the evenness of assessment practice. In the senior department, the procedures for assessment are particularly helpful in ICT, English and geography. In ICT, progress is assessed in conveniently manageable stages, which has the additional advantage of giving a pupil a sense of progress and thus boosting confidence.
- 2.28 In all subjects, the progress of individual pupils is recorded each half term on three-point scales for attainment and effort. This has the benefit of simplicity but does not allow sufficiently accurate and helpful judgements to be made in monitoring progress, except where a pupil's performance is conspicuously above or below her potential. Standardised assessment scores of ability are available to heads of department and their use is developing. In the senior department, assessment procedures have been improved since the last inspection. In the junior department, monitoring is limited, although some has been undertaken in English.
- 2.29 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 As at the time of the last inspection, the school continues to provide high quality care for pupils of all ages, with mutual respect a conspicuous element in the daily life of the school, both between staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves. The excellent relationships which the teachers have with the pupils enable them to provide effective support and guidance, especially through the half termly tutor meetings in the senior department and the role of the class teacher in the junior department. The arrangements for pupils joining Years 5, 6 and 7 provide a reassuring introduction to the school. The highly successful pastoral arrangements have been honed since the last inspection to maintain an emotionally secure environment for learning. The pastoral teams are highly effective in overseeing both the academic and the personal development of the pupils. The pupils take pride in assembling their individual records of achievement. The sixth-form enjoys a sense of community, the development of independence and the exercise of initiative; for example, in setting up new clubs and societies. Sixth formers have appreciated being consulted over proposed developments to the school.
- 3.2 Throughout the school, the measures to promote good discipline and behaviour are clearly defined in the code of conduct and focus on respect for self, for others, for the environment and for learning. Merits and certificates are awarded and those called to the headmistress to receive them gain a significant sense of pride and self-esteem. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and rules are understood and seen to be reasonable. The measures to deal with any incidents of unacceptable behaviour are graduated, sensitive and effective. Pupils report that measures to prevent bullying are successful, as are the procedures to deal with any unkind incidents. The school as a whole fulfils its aim to develop the individual ‘within a thriving, caring and friendly community’ and it also embraces the junior department objective ‘to value each individual and encourage pupils to feel the value and worth of others’.
- 3.3 In most respects, the school has established highly effective measures to safeguard and promote the pupils’ health and well-being. Child protection arrangements are very well maintained and all members of staff have received suitable training. Careful arrangements ensure that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are made on all staff, and a systematic procedure is followed in carrying out the school’s own employment checks. However, the supervision of younger pupils is not sufficient at lunch-time, when they are at play.
- 3.4 The school takes great care to eliminate risks from fire and other hazards in the various areas of the school and on school visits at home or abroad. Each department has at least one member of staff trained in emergency first aid. The pupils’ health and safety are major priorities for the school and are safeguarded in matters such as the preparation of meals and in the notably careful precautions taken in the science laboratories.
- 3.5 The school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) provide adequate supervision for younger pupils at lunch-time, as a precaution in case an accident should occur when they are at play [Regulation 3.(7)].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.6 The responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire show that the parents have a high degree of satisfaction with the education which the school provides. They are very pleased with the teaching, the curriculum and the behaviour of the pupils. They are also happy with the information they receive from the school, the help and guidance given to their daughters and the opportunities for extra-curricular activities. However, small numbers of parents are critical of the school's provision. Some are dissatisfied with the help for pupils with special educational needs and some feel that the school does not encourage parents to be involved in its life and work. There is also additional criticism among a few parents of sixth formers who would like more information and opportunities for discussion.
- 3.7 The inspectors found that effective support is provided for pupils with special learning needs and that opportunities are available for parents to be involved in the life of the school if they are keen to contribute in some way. However, the half-termly reports for sixth formers are shared directly with the students themselves and not issued to parents. The school's written replies to parents' concerns were sampled as part of the inspection and were seen to be pleasant in tone and professional in content.
- 3.8 Parents' evenings, section handbooks, newsletters, the school magazine and the school website give up-to-date information, and parents are encouraged to contact the school whenever they would find it helpful to do so. Parents' evenings are held twice a year for each year group and full annual reports are issued. The annual reports are informative and comment carefully on pupils' attitudes to work, but they vary in the extent to which they offer useful advice for the improvement of the pupils' work in particular subjects. The school is aware that some teachers are more effective than others in offering subject-specific comment and advice. The brief half-termly reports have optional comments by teachers and so offer little help for improving performance. By contrast, the junior department reports on English, mathematics and science at the end of the year helpfully contain a separate section specifically to note the 'next steps' recommended for the pupils' progress.
- 3.9 The parents' association offers useful opportunities for parents to meet and be involved. Its aims are social and informative. For example, it arranges for parents to help at school functions and it raises money at the sixth-form ball to sponsor 'gap' year activities. Parents also provide valuable help at careers conventions, in providing 'mock' interviews, in offering work experience placements and in accompanying off-site visits for younger pupils.
- 3.10 The school is outstandingly active in forging links with the wider community. For example, it provides French and physical education teaching for local primary schools, it engages in artistic, cultural and political activities with independent and maintained schools and it shares a careers convention with other schools. The library staff have built up a close relationship with local maintained schools through a literary 'shadowing scheme' and other book-based activities with independent and maintained schools. These include visits by primary school pupils to join in events arranged by the school. Further important links are those with Radley College and Abingdon School, mentioned in section 1, and the business and community service links reported in section 2.
- 3.11 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 governing body plays a highly significant part in the development of the school and continues to have the strength noted at the time of the last inspection. It includes a valuable and varied representation from old girls, parents and those with professional and academic experience, and it is influential in the realisation of the school aims for the academic and broader education of the pupils. It operates with considerable efficiency through seven different sub-committees. For example, the academic policy committee is particularly important, because it includes both governors and staff and has approved beneficial modifications to the curriculum. The building and development sub-committee has overseen the extension of the school's accommodation, ensuring its high quality and consequent aesthetic and functional success.
- 4.2 Governors are very well informed about the school, mainly through the headmistress and her reports, but also through induction tours for new governors and briefings at governors' meetings. These have included staff presentations on topics such as applications to American universities, the strategy for developing ICT in the school and the use of statistical data on academic achievement. The governors challenge the school to be innovative in its developments. Contact with the junior department is closely maintained, but direct contact with senior department staff and pupils is limited.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.3 As at the time of the last inspection, the school is under strong and sensitive leadership. Its effectiveness is clearly apparent in the fulfilment of the school's aims, in the high standards which the pupils achieve, in their outstanding personal development and in the quality of their learning, promoted by the whole-hearted commitment of the staff. The headmistress is ably supported by highly capable members of the senior management and leadership teams. The management of the subject departments and the pastoral teams is effective and the provision of financial resources is successful in supporting the educational aims of the school.
- 4.4 The background to the school's three-year plan gives an excellent analysis of the school's situation as a girls' school in the local area. The three-year strategic plan includes identified objectives in which those responsible and the costs are listed. However, the objectives are ambitious rather than clearly presented in stages, and time scales are frequently 'ongoing', so that success is hard to evaluate. Criteria for success are not stated. It is a strong feature that certain of the overall objectives form an identified part of the section and departmental development plans and this indicates the school's strong awareness of the need to involve staff in its priorities. However, many of these priorities, too, tend to be aspirations rather than clearly identified objectives which can be achieved within a definite time scale. Nevertheless, distinct progress is being made on them and a useful system of monitoring operates through discussion.
- 4.5 As at the time of the last inspection, the school secures a generous complement of well-qualified and experienced teachers, with effective support staff. Clear policies for induction of newly qualified teachers and continuing professional development foster the school aim to 'offer intellectually stimulating teaching at the highest levels'. Junior pupils benefit from specialist teaching in physical education, music and French. The review system has developed well since the last inspection and identifies areas for individual training, although

in the last 12 months the emphasis has been on the subject-specific development of staff rather than their pastoral role. Induction arrangements have been strengthened and the school makes well-conceived provision for newly qualified teachers. Whole-school training has focused on important areas, including special needs, child protection, health and safety, ICT, and pupils' learning.

- 4.6 The small junior department is under the management of the senior school and the day-to-day running is the responsibility of the class teachers. As the school is aware, it does not have its own specific primary direction. The widely separate location of its two classrooms is another factor which limits the junior department's operation as a cohesive unit.
- 4.7 In accordance with its aims, the school's financial resources are well managed to ensure a plentiful supply of good quality teaching materials and facilities within accommodation which is well suited to its educational purposes. Some of the accommodation is of superb quality, notably the sports halls, the multi-purpose atrium, the performing arts centre and the multimedia room for modern foreign languages. Excellent improvements to accommodation have been successfully completed since the last inspection. However, in science, the small size of several of the laboratories imposes constraints on practical work: for example, the teacher sometimes has to give demonstrations instead of requiring the pupils to perform their own experiments. The position of the library is another limiting factor in accommodation and contributes to its under-use, although the library itself is well stocked.
- 4.8 The administration of the school is effective and communications are efficiently maintained both within the staffroom and in the school at large, so as to enhance the smooth operation of the school.
- 4.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.10 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 school is notably successful in meeting its aim to develop individual talents in a community based on Christian values. The results are high levels of intellectual attainment and outstanding personal development, promoted by strong leadership and management and the emphasis which the staff give to pastoral care. The girls are articulate, mature for their age and thoughtful. They support the school strongly, enjoy their responsibilities and are keen to help those less fortunate than themselves. The school's further successes include excellent relationships, first-rate links with the local community, the high standards achieved in extra-curricular music, drama and sport, and the quality of the pupils' learning, fostered by fully committed staff and much stimulating teaching. A notable feature of the school is the extent to which its pupils are happy to be educated in it; in the pupils' pre-inspection questionnaires the most common spontaneous comment about the school was, "It's great!"
- 5.2 Since the last inspection, good overall progress has been made. It includes the appointment of a deputy head academic and consequent improvements to the curriculum, the introduction of section and departmental development plans, the promotion of ICT and the completion of important building projects. However, further development is needed in monitoring, assessment and reporting, in the implementation of priorities and in the use of ICT.
- 5.3 The school complies with almost all of the regulatory requirements, but does not at present fully meet Standard 3 (welfare, health and safety).

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no major weaknesses, but for the further improvement of its educational provision it should do the following.
1. Establish a fully systematic procedure for monitoring and assessing pupils' progress and ensure that marking and reporting focus on improving their performance in subjects.
 2. Formulate school and departmental development objectives so that they are more clearly achievable and easier to monitor.
 3. Increase the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of subjects.
 4. Operate the junior department as a clearly identifiable unit.
- 5.5 In order to meet all the regulatory requirements, the school must:
- (1) provide adequate supervision for younger pupils at lunch-time, as a precaution in case an accident should occur when they are at play [Regulation 3.(7)].

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 24th to 27th April 2006. 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.
- 6.2 A bursar from another school joined the reporting inspector on the second preliminary visit as part of the Independent Schools' Bursars Association (ISBA) scheme, spending the day with the bursar's department. The principal findings have been included in the relevant sections of this report.

List of Inspectors

Richard Shannon	Reporting Inspector, Her Majesty's Inspector (rtd)
Elizabeth Henson	Assistant Reporting Inspector, Former Head, GSA Junior School
George Fisher	Headmaster, HMC School
Margaret Houston	Former Headmistress, GSA School
Liz Knibb	Senior Mistress, HMC School
Kathryn Matthews	Deputy Head (Academic), GSA School
Mary Morris	Headmistress, GSA School
Jonathan Varcoe	Former Director of Music, HMC School