



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**MILTON ABBEY SCHOOL**

**STANDARD INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Milton Abbey School

|                             |  |            |  |
|-----------------------------|--|------------|--|
| Full Name of School/College | <b>Milton Abbey School</b>   |            |  |
| DfE Number                  | <b>835/6015</b>  |            |  |
| Registered Charity Number   | <b>306318</b>  |            |  |
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| Head                        | <b>Mr Gareth Doodes</b>  |            |  |
| Chair of Governors          | <b>Mr James Barnes</b>   |            |  |
| Age Range                   | <b>13 to 18</b>  |            |  |
| Total Number of Pupils      | <b>225</b>   |            |  |
| Gender of Pupils            | <b>Boys (Mixed in the Sixth Form)</b>                                  |            |  |
| Number of Day Pupils        | Total:   | <b>22</b>  | Capacity for flexi-boarding: <b>22</b> |
| Number of Boarders          | Total:   | <b>203</b> |  |
|                             | Full:  | <b>203</b> | Weekly: <b>0</b>                       |
| Inspection dates            | <b>05 Oct 2010 to 06 Oct 2010<br/>01 Nov 2010 to 03 Nov 2010</b>       |            |  |

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in October 2004.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government 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 is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

\*These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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 boarding was not carried out in conjunction with the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report refers to an inspection in December 2009 and can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will 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.

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Milton Abbey School is situated near Blandford Forum in Dorset. Founded in 1953, the school's main building is a Gothic mansion with grounds designed by Capability Brown. In the grounds is the Abbey church founded in approximately 933 AD and used by the school for services. The school caters for boys aged 13 to 18 and has a mixed sixth form. It has 225 pupils, over 200 of whom are boarders, and 104 are in the sixth form. Since its inspection in 2004, the school has had refurbished some boarding accommodation and restructured the senior management team. The headmaster and deputy headmaster were appointed in September 2010.
- 1.2 The ability profile of the school to GCSE is in line with the national average, whilst that in the sixth form is below average. There are 109 pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), all of whom receive specialist learning support from the school. Pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds. The vast majority of pupils are British with a few pupils from overseas, whose language needs are well met.
- 1.3 Since its foundation, the school has seen itself as a forward-looking school that embraces tradition yet celebrates individuality and innovation. The school aims to promote excellence, hard work, industry and endeavour, celebrating success in whatever form it may come with a commitment that no one is overlooked. The school encourages all pupils to have big ambitions, big achievements, and big hearts. The school sees the Abbey as the beating heart of school life and is committed to helping pupils to develop the Christian values of care, forgiveness and compassion.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school; at times, the terms 'lower sixth' and 'upper sixth' are used to refer to Years 12 and 13. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following table.

| School       | NC name |
|--------------|---------|
| Third Form   | Year 9  |
| Fourth Form  | Year 10 |
| Fifth Form   | Year 11 |
| Lower Sixth  | Year 12 |
| Middle Sixth | Year 13 |

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 The quality of the pupils' overall achievements is good; their attainment in external examinations and the progress made are satisfactory and they achieve a high level of success in their extra-curricular and sporting activities. Pupils confirm that the environment of the historic buildings, the abbey and the estate supports their achievement significantly. Pupils enjoy their learning, work well with each other and develop good skills, notably in vocational and practical subjects. Achievement is enhanced by the excellent quality of the library, the learning support programme and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils' learning also benefits from individual tutoring by teachers. Whilst pupils' learning is supported by good teaching in many areas, a significant minority of teaching does not sufficiently stretch pupils, does not always take into account the information on pupils' individual needs and does not use ICT sufficiently to enhance pupils' learning.
- 2.2 The high level of pupils' personal development meets the school's aim of finding a spark that will light a passion in every pupil. Miltonians have a range of talents and these are nurtured by excellent pastoral care. The linkage of tutors with boarding houses, housemasters and housemistresses is at the heart of the pastoral care provision. Whilst strong pastoral care systems are in place, it is the interest in the welfare of the individual pupil which enables talents and interests to blossom. Pupils support each other strongly, both within their year groups and across the years. This is reflected in life in the boarding houses, underpinned by the good influence of the staff, who contribute to pupils' moral and social development by helping them to understand their responsibilities as they take on leadership roles. Pupils are naturally engaging and willingly express opinions on their community, both on its unique qualities and their ideas for developing it.
- 2.3 A prime aim of the school is to be inclusive, caring and ambitious for every pupil. The new management team and the governing body ensure that this aim is successful in practice. Almost all of the recommendations of the previous report have been addressed but the academic development plan has not yet been put fully into practice. The management appreciates the need to empower middle managers to play a greater role in whole-school academic strategies, particularly in relation to teaching, learning and achievement. Investment in a higher quality of boarding accommodation remains a priority and is being addressed in this academic year. The monitoring of regulatory requirements is good and clearly recorded. Parents are supportive of the school. They have concerns about some aspects of special needs provision and pupil progress but showed good support of the school's vision for its future. Pupils voiced concerns about being able to express their ideas concerning change in the school, but also confirmed how much they enjoy their school life.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Develop the management of academic departments to involve heads of department in whole-school academic strategies.
  2. Develop subject teachers' awareness of the needs of pupils with LDD to ensure consistency in learning support for these pupils.
  3. Arrange training in ICT for teachers to facilitate the use of interactive resources to enhance the quality of teaching.
  4. Improve the quality of social accommodation in boarding houses.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills**

- 3.1 Pupils are well educated in accordance with the school's aim for excellence in all fields. The pupils' achievements are good overall. They are at least satisfactory in most academic subjects, very good in sixth form vocational subjects and excellent in a good number of extra-curricular activities, particularly sport.
- 3.2 The pupils' speaking and listening skills are at least sound and, in many instances, good. They are mostly able to explain clearly and coherently what they have learned in lessons and, at best, as in a Year 13 geography lesson on urban life, pupils speak knowledgeably about their individual research and challenge each other's conclusions. In interviews, pupils spoke confidently and articulately about their school life. The pupils' writing skills show a range of attainment. Both in computer form and in longhand, the best written work was fluent, but for some pupils fluent writing is a challenge. The pupils' creativity and independence of thought is good, exemplified in their development of a drama presentation for the national *Rock Challenge* and in the ingenuity they use in building animal pens. Logical thought is well applied to such issues as assessing the threats to the rearing of game birds. Pupils apply their mathematical skills competently in varied contexts including calculating distances in astronomy. Notable features of the pupils' learning are their prowess in physical activity across a range of sports and outdoor pursuits, their ICT skills and their use of the library for research and personal reading.
- 3.3 Pupils not only enjoy their lives beyond the classroom but reach a high standard in many extra-curricular activities. In sport they enjoy success beyond that expected for a school of this size, with strong results in twenty/twenty cricket, rugby and sailing. In athletics pupils gain county colours and regional colours. The polo team are currently second division national schools champions. The strength of sporting success is reflected in the fact that two recent leavers are playing under-20 rugby for England and another is a member of the 2012 Olympic cycling squad. Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is not only flourishing but the high number of silver and gold awards indicate the pupils' commitment to completing this challenge. In the Ten Tors hike medals are gained in the senior and junior divisions. The combined cadet force (CCF) has strong pupil support, not only at the school but on camps and challenge expeditions. Pupils' participate highly enthusiastically in a wide range of activity, including field sports.
- 3.4 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2007 to 2009. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. In GCSE examinations, results have been similar to the national average for boys in maintained schools. Those at IGCSE have been broadly similar to international norms but below those in UK schools, where the benchmarks are higher. Results in A-level examinations have been below the national average for maintained schools.
- 3.5 Pupils make satisfactory progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. Attainment has been significantly stronger in the vocational subjects studied in the sixth form compared with most academic subjects. Pupils with LDD achieve very well due to their own efforts and the support of an excellent learning support department. Good progress is made by the few pupils with English as an additional language (EAL).

3.6 Pupils, in the main, have positive attitudes to learning and these are particularly evident in the vocational and practical subjects. When pupils are stimulated, they show real enjoyment of their studies. In a sixth-form mathematics lesson pupils gained great satisfaction from the enjoyable experience of working hard and making good progress and in an art class pupils' pleasure at realising they could draw was palpable. Pupils can work well together and also take individual initiative. At best this was seen in pair work in a community living course and in rehearsal for a GCSE drama set text, where boys performed female roles with individual flair. Pupils' behaviour is courteous and respectful towards one another and towards adults. Observation of files and workbooks confirmed that pupils show good organisation and generally take a pride in their work, which is copious in quantity, well presented and, at times, reflects independent thinking.

### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)**

3.7 The curriculum is excellent, as is the programme of extra-curricular activities. It is suitable for all ages, abilities and needs and it supports the aims of the school to find a spark that will light a passion in every pupil.

3.8 The curriculum has been well developed to ensure that pupils with varying needs and abilities have challenging courses. For instance, a core group with specific learning needs is timetabled for learning support instead of studying a modern foreign language. A range of science GCSEs is available to meet the needs and abilities of all pupils, from IGCSE to applied science. In the sixth form, pupils are able to study A-level subjects and BTEC vocational courses which give them the foundations and qualifications for next stage of their education. Courses in countryside management, communications and hospitality prove both very popular and enable pupils to achieve success at a high level. The personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme has been re-designed and re-titled *Enrichment*. This new programme, enhanced by the school's rural setting, gives pupils a wide range of experience beyond the confines of academic subjects. Pupils use the careers library extensively and report that careers advice and guidance are readily available.

3.9 The provision and management of learning support is excellent. Each pupil with LDD has an individual learning plan, which is reviewed regularly and is available online to all teachers. The management and delivery of learning support is a model of best practice and a strength of the school. Pupils in the learning support department are shown that they are valued and cherished. They benefit from a variety of effective teaching methods which match their learning styles to help them overcome their individual learning challenges.

3.10 Since the previous inspection, the school has responded positively to the recommendations about the library and ICT. The school has relocated the library, appointed a full-time librarian and an assistant and developed an extensive, stimulating and appropriate stock. The library is open to pupils throughout the week, although not on Sunday afternoons, and has a dynamic programme of curriculum enrichment through events and display. The ICT recommendation has been met by the provision of three computer suites and the support of the pupils' own laptops through the school's fast wireless network.

3.11 The academic curriculum is supported by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities from rugby, soccer, cricket, tennis, golf, hockey and athletics to shooting,

ferreting, animal management, sailing, motor mechanics, model-making and chapel choir. The CCF is particularly strong in all three sections, with many links to the armed forces, and the provision of an extremely well-managed confidence course. Weekend activities include paint-balling, bowling, quad-biking, socials with girls' schools and films. Parents and pupils, in their responses to the questionnaires, reported that the extra-curricular provision is a strength of the school. The curriculum is enhanced by a plethora of school trips both within the UK and abroad, examples being behind the scenes at the BBC, the First World War battlefields, cultural visits to Italy and Greece and canoeing in Canada.

- 3.12 Links with the community are satisfactory; some are well developed. The key event in the year is the 'Springboard' summer camp, which pupils manage in the school grounds for children from inner London. Pupils also work in local charity shops and local schools and are involved with fun days for local children. Pupils raise funds for a wide range of local and national charities, including by running a silent disco for the Royal Society for the Deaf.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.13 Teaching is good overall and most is effective in promoting progress, and meeting the school's aims. At its best, the teaching develops knowledge, understanding and subject skills in the pupils through well-planned lessons, guided by knowledgeable staff who provide clear feedback and support to each individual pupil.
- 3.14 Teachers know their pupils well and choose topics to which most pupils respond enthusiastically. However, some teachers do not show sufficient awareness of the particular needs of pupils with LDD and their expectations, at times, are not sufficiently high to push pupils to greater achievement. Where very good to excellent teaching was observed, teachers related well to the pupils' needs, did not accept a low level of response, and strongly encouraged pupils to aim higher.
- 3.15 In most lessons observed the pace was appropriate, interaction between pupils and teachers was lively and pupils were given support through praise and encouragement. In lessons judged to be excellent, teachers maintained a fast pace, challenged pupils with new ideas and offered novel ways of helping pupils to remember major concepts. This was particularly notable in mathematics lessons. Independent learning featured in a small proportion of lessons, mainly where pupils had undertaken previous research and were able to present this to the class.
- 3.16 Lesson planning is thorough and well organised to ensure lessons are purposeful, and to enable pupils to make good progress in the lesson. In a few cases progress is hampered by unsatisfactory classroom management. At best teachers use a range of methods to stimulate interest and devise creative tasks to challenge pupils and encourage them to be major contributors to the success of the lesson. Information and communication technology was used effectively in a sixth form history lesson on Gladstone's reform plan, but overall, teachers make insufficient use of ICT, although pupils have well-developed ICT skills.
- 3.17 Teachers have very good subject knowledge and, in the main, are confident in the classroom. Teachers use time effectively, but do not always act on late arrivals to lessons. A good range of resources, including the library, is available, but overall teachers make limited use of interactive whiteboards. Resources are used most effectively in the vocational subjects, where pupils are stimulated in their learning by being exposed to practical applications such as gathering timber in the woods for

design and technology (DT) projects. Classroom displays in many teaching rooms are stimulating, with pupils' work taking pride of place. In a few classrooms, however, displays are tired and not reflective of pupils' efforts.

- 3.18 The marking of work is thorough and conforms, in the main, to the school marking policy. Comments written on the pupils' work give good guidance for improvement and praise is a feature of much of the marking. Teachers also make good use of oral feedback to reinforce pupils' understanding and this is particularly supportive of those with LDD. However, teachers do not make sufficient use of the standardised data available, either to track pupils' progress or to guide curricular planning. Homework is regularly set and of an appropriate level.

## **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good and strongly supports the school's aims to develop the moral compass and encourage pupils to consider the importance of community living and caring for our neighbours. The pupils' personalities are well developed for their age. They show a good understanding of the feelings of others. The boarding tradition in the school contributes strongly to their emotional maturity and self-awareness.
- 4.2 The pupils' spiritual development is good. Many pupils respond positively to the inspiration of their environment and articulated their pleasure at being able to contemplate the effect of the natural surroundings on their daily lives. Pupils articulate how much they gain from the atmosphere of the Abbey itself and also expressed the way in which speakers at services challenge their awareness of topics such as selflessness and humility. Most pupils also engage positively in discussions about issues such as death and the afterlife, and show self-awareness by being able to be reflective about their own personality traits as seen in PSHCE lessons.
- 4.3 The moral development of the pupils is good. Pupils care about each other and show support of those in the community with particular needs. This support is also evident in the boarding houses, where senior pupils show, by example, how moral order is best achieved. The pupils' conduct is good: they respect the rules of the school. Pupils have a particularly well developed moral awareness of issues associated with rural life such as hunting. Pupils have limited practical opportunities for the support of those less fortunate than themselves outside the community, but they do strongly support a range of national and international charities.
- 4.4 Social development is excellent. Pupils have an awareness of and sympathy for others, the quality of the relationships in the boarding houses being particularly strong. Pupils contribute well to the society of the school through a thriving school council, where views are expressed openly and sensitively. School pilots (prefects) and house pilots give good leadership within the community of the school. Practical social support is given by thirty externally-trained peer mentors from the lower sixth who look after individual pupils in Year 9 and also support other pupils on request. A smaller group of volunteer peer listeners have a high profile in the school and many pupils confirmed that these listeners are a strong source of individual support. Pupils give their time to a number of social projects, including the 'Springboard' charity. The quality of the pupils' interaction is particularly strong, underpinned by excellent relationships within the school community and the outstanding pastoral care shown by all staff. Pupils are pleasant and courteous and have good social skills.
- 4.5 The cultural awareness shown by the pupils is good. They have an easy approach to pupils of other nationalities, appreciating cultural differences and beliefs of other faiths. Pupils of other nationalities report that they felt welcome from the first day in school. Living in the heart of the country, pupils have real opportunities to appreciate the rural as opposed to the urban environment, learning for instance about sustainable use of resources in DT or the infrastructure of a game bird shoot in countryside management. Pupils have a good understanding of public institutions because they regularly read newspapers in the houses and are stimulated by visiting speakers from the media and politics. Through the school's extensive programme of

overseas tours and expeditions, pupils gain awareness of artistic and architectural genres as well as challenging them with the realities of different ways of life. Pupils reported that a recent visit to South Africa did just that.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety**

- 4.6 The school's aim to provide pupils with a happy and supportive environment is very well met in practice by the quality of pastoral care, which is excellent. Parents, in their responses to the questionnaire, commented on the strength of this care, rooted in the house system. Pupils benefit from a tutorial system in which tutors are members of the boarding house teams, thus enabling them to meet their tutees on a regular basis. In addition, dedicated tutorial time is built into the timetable. Tutors, housemasters and housemistresses monitor the development of pupils in their houses, reporting regularly to the assistant head (pastoral) and using the weekly 'Flagging' meeting to update all staff on those pupils who are having problems. Pupils and staff comment that the small size of the school and the daily conversations contribute to strong management of personal development. The PSHCE programme has been carefully developed to ensure that the whole range of educational experience offered by this school contributes to the pupils' care.
- 4.7 Pupils confirmed that teachers and support staff show interest in them as individuals and offer support both on personal and academic matters. Pupils also appreciate the role of the peer listeners, who are trained by an external agency. At a time of change in the management of the school, a small minority of senior pupils in response to the questionnaire felt the school did not respond positively to their concerns. Observation of a dynamic, pupil-chaired school council and discussions with pupils confirmed that the pupils' views are being considered, even though the new administration was strengthening the guidelines on pupil management.
- 4.8 The school's commitment to supporting and safeguarding its pupils is clearly publicised in handbooks for parents, pupils and staff and is effective in practice. Pupils comment that they feel safe and the very positive response of pupils in the questionnaire to the issue of bullying confirms that the anti-bullying policy is not only clear, but is actually working in the pupils' daily lives. The school's rules are clear. The philosophy of community living at Milton Abbey, however, is not so much adherence to the rules but a commitment to the code of conduct, which emphasises self-management, supported by peer mentoring and the awards programme. Again, a small minority of senior pupils in response to the questionnaire felt that sanctions were unfairly given but inspection evidence did not uphold this view. Serious disciplinary issues are rare but are dealt with in accordance with the disciplinary policy.
- 4.9 Led by the deputy headmaster as the designated officer, the school's approach to safeguarding its pupils is strong, with a comprehensive child protection policy well known by both staff and senior pupils. Staff training in this area is appropriate and up to date. The safe recruitment of staff and governors is secure and well documented. Fire safety is a priority, with regular, documented practices; health and safety measures are thorough, overseen by the health and safety committee, which includes governors. In a school which provides so many opportunities for outdoor and rural pursuits, the risk assessments for those activities are clearly drawn and were observed to be effective in practice. The school has a stringent website filter which protects pupils but, on occasions, overly limits research opportunities. The access plan for those with learning or physical challenges is up to date. Observation of the dining hall and discussions with pupils over meals confirmed the quality of the

catering including healthy options. The medical centre is very well managed and resourced, the staff providing a high level of medical and pastoral support. Ancillary medical services are a feature of this centre. Pupils have a wide range of opportunities for physical exercise, which is at the heart of school life. The admission and attendance registers are correctly maintained and stored.

#### **4.(c) The quality of boarding education**

- 4.10 Boarding lies at the heart of the school and the excellent ethos generated by this caring community contributes very significantly to the pupils' personal development and supports their education. The boarding life of the school strongly meets the boarding aim of not isolating pupils from the family and the world but rather expanding the pupils' opportunities with a clear eye on the world as it is and in close co-operation with the family.
- 4.11 Relationships within boarding amongst pupils and between pupils and staff are very strong. Boarders acknowledge the dedicated support offered by the hard-working and compassionate staff in boarding, to whom boarders show both gratitude and affection. Boarders are known as individuals by the house teams, and these teams do all they can to make life in the boarding houses as relaxed as possible. Boarders show fierce loyalty to their houses and to each other. Rewards are frequent and boarders are regularly congratulated by the boarding staff and senior pupils. Boarders take responsibility readily and help each other. The boarding house is, for most, their second home.
- 4.12 Boarders feel safe and are well cared for, not only by boarding staff, but by the medical centre, which provides additional pastoral support. Boarders confirmed that they were very happy with the quality and quantity of the school catering, especially as most boarders are keen athletes and value good nutrition. Correct policies are in place for the care of boarders. Boarding staff are well trained in aspects of boarding management, many having completed the Boarding Schools Association professional development certificate.
- 4.13 During the week, boarders' activities are an integrated part of the timetable as even the few day pupils are boarders for the whole of the school day. Inspectors observed enthusiastic support of activities by boarders. Boarders report that they have a good range of activities at the weekends. There are frequent trips out of school and a plethora of activities from which to choose.
- 4.14 Recommendations on boarding from the previous ISI report and the most recent Ofsted boarding welfare inspection have all been met, except for the provision of suitable communal recreation areas in some houses. The school acknowledges that improvement in boarding accommodation is a priority and that element of the school development plan is due to be put into action this academic year.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

- 5.1 Governance is good and meets the governing body's aim of ensuring that the school is well run. As with the senior management, the governing body has seen recent change with a new chairman at the start of this academic year. This planned change, complementing the appointment of a new headmaster, has been linked with a review of some elements of governance. Progress has already been made with the identification of specific areas of expertise for new governors and the drawing up of a comprehensive five-year development plan both for physical provision and academic improvement. The governors were closely involved in the appointment of the new headmaster and give him and his new senior management team strong support. Parents, in their responses to the questionnaire, confirmed their approval of the new direction of the governing body.
- 5.2 Governors have a good insight into the workings of the school. Governors are kept informed through the headmaster's reports, the committee minutes and governors' visits to the school, where they interact with pupils, staff and parents. The structure of the governors' committees serves the school well in monitoring the school's finances, its health and safety practices and its academic provision. The ambitious building programme for boarding, starting this academic year, indicates the governors' vision and control of financial resources. The academic committee is developing its remit so that governors are more closely linked with departments.
- 5.3 Governors discharge their legal responsibilities effectively. They ensure that suitable staff are appointed using the correct appointment procedures, that the welfare of pupils is a high priority and well managed and that the culture of health and safety is strong and effective. The governor responsible for safeguarding has regular meetings at the school supporting the designated person, and the full governing body monitors the annual audit of child protection. Although governors are aware of individual school policies, they do not have a system for regularly reviewing all school policies.

### **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management**

- 5.4 The leadership and management of the school are good overall. The headmaster and deputy headmaster were new in post in September 2010 and a new senior management team was established at the same time. Thus, in the first half of term the senior management has developed to a point where it strongly promotes the aims of the school, oversees satisfactory standards in public examinations and promotes high standards in extra-curricular achievements and personal development.
- 5.5 The senior management is effective in ensuring that policies are correctly implemented. Monitoring of health and safety practices are undertaken by senior managers as part of their delegated responsibilities and the monitoring is effective. This is particularly important in a school with a comprehensive rural pursuits programme involving safety issues. A high level of pupil care was observed in this area. Senior management also exercises a high level of care in relation to the safeguarding of pupils, reflected in the quality of staff training in child protection and health and safety.

- 5.6 The new senior management team is building on the work of previous senior leaders in giving the school a clear educational direction. It recognises that personal development and pastoral care are regarded as strengths of the school, but has already undertaken a whole school review, identifying curriculum revision, improving teaching and learning strategies and raising academic expectation as priorities. It is recognised by pupils, teachers and parents that the new senior management team is focusing strongly on the direction of the school over the next five years.
- 5.7 In that regard, the new development plan is an ambitious one with targets for all areas of the school, particularly in academic improvement and new boarding accommodation. The new management team has made a good start in meeting the needs of the school as stated in the development plan, but, as yet, has not had the time to establish fully all the structures required to support their vision. Since the previous inspection the school has addressed a number of organisational issues. The assistant head (academic) is a member of the senior management team. Departmental development has included standardised schemes of work and a greater adherence to the school assessment policy, but departmental development plans are not yet linked to the new school development plan. Heads of department are not fully involved in the management of academic data, whole school curriculum planning or an annual monitoring of departmental performance. Punctuality has been addressed with an electronic bell system but this has not fully solved this issue. Pastoral care and the welfare of boarders are very well managed both by its structures and by the quality of the care provided by individual staff. This is inextricably linked to the high quality of the boarding life of the school, supporting pupils as individuals and in the wide range of interests they can pursue outside the classroom.
- 5.8 Staff recruitment is well managed and the school's procedures for checking all school staff and governors are thorough and very well documented. Appraisal of teachers, however, is not consistently implemented. Staff do have opportunities for continuing professional development but the programme for this is not linked to the appraisal scheme.

### **5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.9 Links with parents are good and support the school's aim of working in close co-operation with families.
- 5.10 Although the parents' responses to the questionnaire were few in number, the parents who responded confirmed that they were pleased, in the main, with all aspects of the school. Parents showed strong commendation of the range of the experience offered to their children, the quality of pastoral care and the promptness of response by the school to parental communications. Whilst no significant criticisms were made in the responses received, a few parents were concerned about pupil behaviour and the specific provision for pupils with learning needs. Inspectors noted the targeting of the few instances of pupil misbehaviour by the new management team. Inspection evidence confirms that the learning support department offers excellent support but this is not always complemented by teachers' in-class support.
- 5.11 Communication with parents is very good and all required information is provided. Channels of communication are plentiful, allowing parents regular and thorough access to information about their children and the life of the school. E-mail contact with parents is frequent. The headmaster sends three letters a term to parents and

keeps them further informed by e-mail of any special announcements. Half-termly newsletters are also issued to parents. An informative parent handbook gives all parents details about their children's lives and new parents receive comprehensive information about the school. The website was recently updated, and is well maintained and a source of considerable information about the school. A parent portal is planned for this academic year to give parents further interaction with the school.

- 5.12 Parents have many opportunities to participate in the life and work of the school, for example being invited to come into school to watch matches or performances, support Sunday worship in chapel and be involved in the rural pursuits programme. There is, however, no formal parents association.
- 5.13 Reports are sent regularly and inform parents well about pupil progress with useful guidance for improvement and development. Reports include pupils' comments on their report and progress over the term. A few parents in their responses requested that grades in reports should be more closely linked to examination grades. The school is currently dealing with this. Regular parents' meetings are held for each year group.
- 5.14 The school handles complaints with care. The headmaster deals quickly with any matters raised by parents and sends a number of handwritten letters in answer to concerns. The formal complaints policy is readily available and conforms to requirements. Parents expressed themselves as being pleased with the contact they have with the school.

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

## **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 chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mr Adrian Underwood

Mr Roger Clark

Dr Iain Farrell

Reporting Inspector

Headmaster, SHMIS School

Director of Studies, HMC School