



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

**SEDBERGH SCHOOL
STANDARD INSPECTION**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Sedbergh School

Full Name of School	Sedbergh School
DfE Number	909/6026
Registered Charity Number	1080672
Address	Sedbergh School Sedbergh Cumbria LA10 5HG
Telephone Number	01539 620535
Fax Number	01539 621301
Email Address	hm@sedberghschool.org
Head	Mr Andrew Fleck
Chair of Governors	Mr Robert Napier
Age Range	13 to 19
Total Number of Pupils	439
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (306 boys; 133 girls;)
Numbers by Age	11-16: 229 16-18: 210
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 15
Number of Boarders	Total: 424 Full: 424
Inspection dates	4 May 2011 to 5 May 2011 16 May 2011 to 18 May 2011

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 March 2005.

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 Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills, 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 any 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 February 2011 and can be found at 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 Sedbergh School was founded in 1525 by Roger Lupton, the Provost of Eton, and sits amongst the Howgill Fells midway between the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District National Parks. It is five miles from the M6 and served by a mainline rail-link between London and Glasgow. It is almost entirely a boarding school, having only fifteen day pupils out of the total of 439 pupils at the time of the inspection. It has taken girls since 2001; at the time of the inspection, about one-third of the pupils were girls and two-thirds were boys. A distinctive feature of the school is that all meals are taken in boarding houses, including breakfast and supper for day pupils. Almost all pupils stay every weekend allowing activities to continue seven days of the week. Families may specify when their children take exeats. The school is a charity overseen by a board of governors. Since the last inspection, Sedbergh Junior School has been opened on an adjacent site and school facilities improved; the current headmaster has been in post since September 2010.
- 1.2 Pupils are drawn from a wide variety of prep schools from Scotland, the north of England and the Midlands. Increasing numbers join from independent grammar schools and about one in six lives abroad. Pupils are mainly of white British ethnicity.
- 1.3 Standardised tests show that pupils' average ability is in line with the national average. No pupils have statements of educational need but the school has identified 64 as having some form of individual learning need of whom 29 are judged as needing specialist support. There are 101 pupils with English as an additional language (EAL); of these 37 receive support and the remainder are fluent in English. Almost all pupils leave at the age of eighteen to progress to higher education.
- 1.4 Sedbergh aims to provide a broad education, to develop the latent potential in all its pupils across the whole curriculum and to help them to obtain the best possible qualifications. Extra-curricular, sporting, cultural and social activities complement this and prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life. The school aims to provide a friendly and supportive environment which recognises the worth of each individual and is welcoming to the parents of its pupils, encouraging them to share in the life of both school and house.
- 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 excellent curriculum and outstanding range of other opportunities enable pupils to achieve well overall, and to achieve excellence in much of their independent work and in extra-curricular activities. The most able pupils, in particular, utilise fully opportunities to develop their work beyond the curriculum, so that their research and independent learning skills develop rapidly along with basic skills in literacy and numeracy. By the time they leave, pupils handle complex ideas well, think creatively and show an excellent understanding of language. Creative work shows flair and imagination. Pupils attain standards above the average for maintained schools at both GCSE and A level, and in 2008 and 2009 A-level results were comparable to those in selective schools. Pupils thus make good progress to GCSE and excellent progress in the sixth form. On leaving, many gain places at their first choices of university. These standards are achieved through teaching which is good overall and frequently excellent; pupils particularly appreciate the level of individual support they receive. The substantial amount of teaching of the highest quality combines clear expectations, enthusiasm, brisk pace, interest and challenge. In almost all lessons, pupils' needs are met well, though support for those with individual needs and EAL is inconsistent, as is the quality of marking. Teachers contribute much beyond the classroom, and the quality of sports coaching and instrumental instruction is particularly high.
- 2.2 Pupils' personal development is excellent. They are self-assured without being arrogant; they are reflective, aware of the needs of others and caring to their fellows. Pupils of all ages take their responsibilities seriously with senior pupils playing a key role in both house and school. They feel their role is valued and that their voice is heard. Excellent pastoral care and boarding arrangements provide a strong and secure base for the busy lives that pupils lead. The confidence to try comes from the support that pupils receive from staff and their peers; they are willing to take risks. The day pupils are fully integrated into the school. Arrangements for child protection are robust and staff are fully trained.
- 2.3 Governors give excellent strategic leadership to the school. Their contact with staff enables them to have a clear view of school issues and understand its unique values. Leadership in school is also excellent. The school has considerable capacity to build on its existing success by continuing to review current practice and aiming for ever higher standards. It maintains an excellent balance between its well recognised traditional strengths and its focus on creative and academic standards, on developing independence of learning and mind and on providing the highest quality of pastoral care. All this is recognised fully by both pupils and their parents. Parents were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school; there were no areas of significant concern.

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. Ensure that more consistent support is given to pupils with individual learning needs and EAL.
 2. Ensure that all marking indicates fully how pupils can improve their work.

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' achievement is good overall, with excellent achievement in much of the independent work and research they carry out, and in the exceptional range of extra-curricular activities at which the school excels. The school achieves its aims extremely well. Both pupils and parents were very positive about the progress pupils make. The youngest pupils show a good grasp of basic concepts, and apply their understanding well. As they move towards GCSE, pupils show increased understanding across the curriculum and an increased ability to think logically, to engage in independent work and to reflect on the quality of what they do, building on projects completed in Year 9. The best work is well researched with material which goes far beyond the specification and which often links ideas from several subjects, for example when discussing Galileo's discoveries in the context of his time. Work on Euler's equation took Year 11 pupils who had taken GCSE into the realms of complex, irrational and transcendental numbers, equipping them to explain difficult ideas to both staff and students. Another Year 11 project explored the links between insanity and genius without preconception. Pupils' secure grasp of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) supports their work across the curriculum.
- 3.2 By A level, pupils' level of understanding and application has developed to a high level. They show a deep understanding of key themes in literature, draw together complex ideas in economics, think creatively and show an excellent understanding of language. The most able pupils produce intelligent and cogent notes which demonstrate the ability to advance their own understanding and knowledge. They show a real enjoyment in manipulating language. A high level of technical and mathematical knowledge supports work in subjects such as economics and chemistry. Creative work in both design and technology and art shows flair, imagination and the commitment to sustain demanding projects through to the end. Throughout the school, support for pupils with individual needs and those with EAL enables them to progress well in many lessons; however a lack of structure means that some teaching is not planned fully to meet their needs. When they leave, pupils gain places at a range of higher education institutions with a significant proportion entering their chosen university.
- 3.3 Pupils sing well both as a school and in more specialist groups, where they show stylistic development, good ensemble and considerable concentration. Projects in design and technology range from large scale agricultural machinery to a cider press and wine racks, all executed with high levels of skill and ingenuity. Art work shows creativity, imagination and a wide range of technique. Pupils achieve a wide range of external academic recognition gaining awards in areas including art, engineering, mathematics and geology. Their wide range of individual and group successes include publishing a historical book and creative writing, debating and individual music examinations. Their skills are recognised at a regional and national level, in national music ensembles, and in playing for county and national sides in a wide range of sports. School teams perform at the highest level showing the school's strength in depth across a wide range of disciplines; they also show high standards of sportsmanship, endeavour and personal achievement.

- 3.4 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2008-2010. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. GCSE results have been above the national average for maintained schools. Over these three years, nearly half the grades gained were A* or A, which is over twice the national average. IGCSE performance has varied between subjects with some being above international norms and others slightly below. Results have been below UK norms, where the benchmark is higher.
- 3.5 A-level results in 2008-9 have been above the national average for maintained schools and also similar to the national average for maintained selective schools. Results in 2010 were similar to the national average for maintained schools. During these three years, nearly two-thirds of grades gained were A* to B, which is above the national average. These results, and the quality of work done from day to day, show that pupils make good progress up to GCSE and excellent progress in the sixth form in relation to the average for pupils of similar ability.
- 3.6 Pupils are excellent students. They are highly motivated, maintaining considerable focus even when work is difficult. Only very occasionally does their attention wander. Pupils ask probing questions of their teachers and of their classmates, and review other pupils' work with sensitivity and skill. They listen to each other and work well collaboratively. They are as ready to seek help as their teachers are to provide it. Pupils are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and strive to improve. They value the library as a place for private study and it is also well used as a venue for intellectual discussion and debate.

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

- 3.7 Both the academic curriculum and extra-curricular provision are excellent, building on provision at the time of the last inspection and fulfilling the school's aim to provide a high quality all-round education suitable for all ages and abilities. The strong pastoral system ensures pupils take full advantage of opportunities to pursue academic and co-curricular excellence.
- 3.8 The academic curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils benefit from a wide range of subjects at GCSE and A Level, within which the school tries to accommodate pupils' choices. In addition, an increasing range of opportunities enables pupils to learn to work independently from an early age, to present and discuss ideas. Pupils have extensive opportunities to extend their learning beyond the curriculum. From Year 9, pupils are introduced to societies ranging from the debating society and *Collegium Musicum* to the science society and book clubs. Many of these opportunities give older pupils experience of leading and running activities for younger ones. An extensive programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) includes issues relating to ICT, religion and morals, financial matters, and the law. An outstanding lesson on the excessive consumption of alcohol encouraged pupils to take responsibility for the choices they make.
- 3.9 The school seeks continually to improve the curriculum. At present it is increasing pupils' creative experience in Year 9 by introducing drama and by teaching ICT largely through the performing and visual arts, to create more challenge and develop higher order skills. It is introducing a smaller number of longer lessons in September to use time more efficiently, in view of the distances between classrooms on the large campus.

- 3.10 The curriculum is well-supported by good ICT facilities, which are used particularly well for independent research. The school library is highly valued, especially by sixth-form pupils. Wider use is encouraged through activities such as book club. Outings and residential trips provide further stimulus. Pupils attended the opera in Salford during the inspection. Further afield, recent trips have included a sports tour to South Africa, expeditions to Malawi and Belize, a study visit to the battlefields in France and a choir tour in Europe. Pupils benefit from a wide variety of local and international community links; for example, pupils are actively engaged with local schools.
- 3.11 The exceptional range and quality of extra-curricular activities includes an extensive programme of individual and team sports, together with creative and academic activities in which participation is very high. Performance in sport is enhanced by the professionalism of the coaching staff; for example, technical cricket coaching uses video analysis to improve technique, specialist coaching is provided in individual athletics events, and pupils are supported by the conditioning coach in a variety of sports. Pupils receive tuition of similar standard in music from professional musicians.
- 3.12 The school makes excellent use of its unique setting and facilities. Year 10 pupils enjoy a carousel programme of outdoor pursuits, ranging from caving and climbing to sailing and kayaking. Fives, fell-running, the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme promote independence, self-sufficiency and leadership. Pupils enjoy the way challenge contributes to their personal development, and appreciate the high standards and range of opportunities. The school is committed to high standards and offers sufficient opportunities for pupils of all abilities to participate; for example, during the inspection there were flute quartet, chapel choir and string quartet practices, CCF band and house music rehearsals, in addition to the wide range of sport.
- 3.13 Regular tutor meetings and internal assessments make pupils aware of their strengths, weaknesses and individual learning needs. Specialised learning support is provided outside lessons to pupils who need it. Further support is provided in some lessons, but a lack of coordination means that this support is not always carefully tailored to pupils' needs. The school is developing strategies staff can use to support pupils more consistently, drawing on information from new standardised tests on entry. EAL pupils receive support based on entry tests and perceived need. The school provides a wide range of enhancement for its most gifted pupils, such as societies, clubs and teams and, in many classes, teachers adapt their teaching successfully to ensure that all pupils are challenged.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.14 Teaching is good overall with a substantial proportion of excellent lessons. Teaching supports the school's aim to develop pupils' potential extremely well. Pupils of all ages say how much they appreciate the individual help they receive, saying teachers never fail to find time to help them. Support for individual pupils' learning needs is better than at the time of the previous inspection, but lesson planning is not always sharply enough focused to meet them fully.
- 3.15 The significant proportion of teaching which is of the highest quality is characterised by clear expectations, excellent subject knowledge and an exceptional enthusiasm for the subject, which is communicated to pupils and inspires work that often goes well beyond the curriculum. Lessons have a brisk pace and combine interest and challenge. The diverse blend of teaching methods enables complex ideas to be explored fully. Teachers make pupils think with challenging questions, whilst creating an ethos in which pupils are keen to contribute even if their answers may not be perfect. Revision work is well managed so that it remains interesting and lively. Relationships are excellent, and teachers provide help well beyond the classroom. Excellent use is made of resources, with a number of classrooms providing a particularly lively and stimulating environment. Teachers know pupils well and, in the great majority of lessons, meet their individual needs well.
- 3.16 In the small minority of lessons which are satisfactory there is less support for pupils' individual needs, lessons are less structured so that teaching fails to challenge; routine tasks fail to capture pupils' interest and lessons are too strongly led by the teacher.
- 3.17 Marking is inconsistent; the school is aware of this and has developed new policies to improve it. Less effective marking is restricted to ticks or simple marks with no indication of how pupils may improve their work. Higher quality marking identifies clear targets for development, and pupils say they find this helpful. They also appreciate the feedback given in class and the opportunities to evaluate each other's work. Staff are now using baseline ability testing to inform academic planning, giving them a clearer picture of pupils' learning styles to assist teachers to support their needs.
- 3.18 Overall, the impact of teaching extends well beyond the classroom. Teachers support a range of activities which extend and develop pupils' learning further, such as independent work and research, clubs and societies; high class specialist staff provide coaching and individual tuition, especially in music and sport. Many academic staff also contribute their expertise, ensuring that pupils benefit from activities which are well run, purposeful and enjoyable.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They are articulate and entertaining, self-assured and confident, without being arrogant, and show pride in their school. Both pupils and staff recognise they live and work in an exceptional community, in which pupils are well known as individuals, both to staff and their peers. Pupils become tolerant of others and celebrate success, whether their own or that of their peers. They show great assurance when taking part in performances and rehearsals. Parents appreciate the school's sense of community and service.
- 4.2 Pupils' spiritual awareness is excellent. Pupils flourish spiritually in a school with a clear Christian ethos, and this context is very important for many pupils and staff. The weakness in spiritual provision at the previous inspection has been addressed. Chapel services are interesting and uplifting, and pupils' involvement leads to good quality singing. Individual pupils regularly lead worship in whole school services, and there is growing support for voluntary services such as Compline. Links between the chaplaincy and PSHE are particularly strong, so that pupils have the opportunity to reflect on issues from differing points of view.
- 4.3 Pupils' moral development is excellent, resulting from the caring atmosphere which pervades the school. Pupils speak particularly eloquently about their house arrangements and the relationships they have with their tutors, who take an active role in all aspects of their tutees' development. PSHE covers areas such as sex, alcohol and drugs and e-safety, and pupils form their own conclusions on matters such as alcohol awareness. They have a clear sense of right and wrong, as evidenced by the considerate way they treat one another. They voice strong opinions on controversial or sensitive moral issues, showing a keen awareness of the ethics involved.
- 4.4 Pupils display a well-developed sense of social awareness. Excellent project work, for example on war and peace, conflict, insanity and democracy was particularly outstanding. They are aware of those less fortunate than themselves; for example, taking part in voluntary work with the mentally disabled. Prefects are exceptional role models and younger pupils look to their house prefect for support in difficult situations. Pupils say they appreciate the opportunities to take responsibility as they move up through their houses.
- 4.5 Pupils' cultural development is outstanding. The integration of pupils from differing backgrounds, countries or cultures within houses, and within the school as a whole, is excellent. Activities such as drama, music and art, alongside CCF and community service, develop pupils' cultural awareness as well as leadership skills. Pupils respect those from other cultural traditions and value the diversity they bring to the school community.

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

- 4.6 The quality of pastoral care is exceptionally high, as confirmed by responses from pupils' and parents' questionnaires. Caring and committed staff provide the cornerstone of high quality support and guidance. Pupils enjoy regular contact with their tutors. Tutors know their charges well and their recently enhanced role has further increased the high level of pastoral care, by supporting pupils' academic studies more rigorously. Support from the chaplaincy is similarly excellent. Pupils say they like being at school, that teachers are concerned for them as people, and that they feel it is easy to turn to staff when they need to.
- 4.7 Relationships between staff and pupils and amongst the pupils are outstanding. Boys and girls enjoy open and supportive relationships with staff and support staff. House prefects enhance these relationships and support house staff well. Pastoral structures are monitored by the strategic leadership team who communicate effectively to ensure that best practice is maintained across all areas.
- 4.8 Procedures for promoting good behaviour, guarding against harassment and bullying, and dealing with unacceptable behaviour are effective. Bullying is rare and the ethos in houses mitigates against it. On the very rare occasions it arises, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Sanctions are carefully monitored.
- 4.9 The school has excellent safeguarding arrangements, which are overseen by both senior staff and governors. Training takes place regularly and includes issues relating to e-safety; it has improved since the last inspection. All necessary measures are taken to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards. For example, fire practices take place regularly both in the school and in the houses. The school has effective health and safety arrangements, with a particularly careful approach to activities such as fell running. Well-qualified staff in the medical centre and sick bays attend to those who are unwell. The school has plans to improve educational access for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities. Admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and stored.
- 4.10 Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and take regular exercise. Food is universally seen as hearty, wholesome and nutritious, a view with which inspectors agreed. The wide range of sporting activities demands regular exercise.

4.(c) The quality of boarding education

- 4.11 The school provides an exceptional boarding experience which is strongly endorsed by the pupils; it fulfils the school's aims to provide a warm, friendly and supportive environment in which pupils can grow up. Boarding is the heartbeat of the school and contributes much to pupils' education and personal development. Pupils are proud of their houses and enjoy the close friendships, the increasing independence, and the developing opportunities for responsibility as they move up through the house. They thus emerge as confident, self-assured and mature young men and women. Boarding fosters a high level of independence to complement the caring and sensitive side shown by the pupils.
- 4.12 Relationships among pupils, and between pupils and staff, are excellent. They consider staff approachable and unfailingly helpful. Senior pupils take responsibility for those junior to them, including their induction. Communication across the year groups is good, and helps promote a caring family atmosphere. This is greatly

enhanced by the more formal atmosphere at lunch, which encourages conversation and promotes good manners and behaviour.

- 4.13 A broad range of activities is available in the evenings and at weekends, and the Sport for All programme is particularly valued. Pupils appreciate the chance to relax and recharge their batteries on Sunday, when a more relaxed atmosphere prevails. School facilities such as design and technology and art are available. Other activities venture further afield; they include the newly formed fly fishing group and a recent caving trip to Gaping Gill.
- 4.14 The houses provide first-class accommodation which is warm and welcoming. There are spacious areas for relaxation, and the ease of access to house staff is much appreciated. Pupils' rooms offer good quality furniture and ample space to study. All have internet access which allows easy contact with home. There were no recommendations from the most recent Ofsted boarding inspection.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 Governors give excellent strategic leadership to the school, together with considerable commitment; the quality of governance has increased since the last inspection. Governors bring a broad and relevant range of experience and expertise to their work, which is supported by a suitable range of committees. They work on regular basis with senior staff as well as with the head and bursar, and meet heads of department and other staff regularly. As a result, they have a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, as well as of its core values and aims. They provide support and challenge for further growth and development, both in the quality of education and in pastoral care.
- 5.2 Individual governors review work in particular areas such as child protection, and the governing body has developed a robust approach to its responsibilities for child protection, health and safety and welfare. Strong financial management has enabled the school to develop a wide range of high class facilities and to take full advantage of its setting, to support pupils' education. Governors take full advantage of opportunities for training. Every parent who responded to the questionnaire was pleased with the work that they do.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.3 Leadership and management are excellent overall; the school has a clear vision both of its unique strengths and how it wishes to develop further. The structure of senior leadership has improved since the last inspection. This high quality leadership and management ensure that the school's educational goals are met, as reflected in pupils' academic success and their excellent personal development.
- 5.4 Those with leadership and management responsibilities fully embrace the recently reviewed aims of the school and have a clear view of their roles and responsibilities, although there are still inconsistencies of approach between some departments. Delegation is excellent and senior staff are highly effective in supporting and enabling those at middle management level, who are then held fully accountable for their part in the school's management. The school has a clear commitment to continuous improvement and the confidence to review, evaluate, consult, refine and innovate. This is reflected in new initiatives which focus more strongly on improving academic standards. Parents are highly supportive of the leadership of the school.
- 5.5 The recently formed strategic leadership team has undertaken a thorough whole school review, and the resulting school development plan is comprehensive. It is strategically focused, on both immediate and more distant projects. Academic developments include a new timetable in September with longer lessons making more efficient use of time; training is planned to help teachers make good use of this change. The school has recently improved its system for assessing pupils' abilities and monitoring their progress; heads of department have recently drawn up a new marking policy to address inconsistencies in practice identified by the school.
- 5.6 Communication amongst staff is exceptional. For example, the system of checking pupils' prep provides useful information both to academic and pastoral leaders so that problems can be swiftly identified; at the same time, it raises the profile of prep

so that pupils view it as an important aspect of their study at school. Meticulous records enable academic managers to monitor issues raised over time.

- 5.7 The school recruits well qualified staff. It makes rigorous checks on appointments and staff are properly trained in safeguarding. Recent recruitment, and greater creativity in staff deployment, ensure that teachers' talents are used to best advantage to achieve the school's aims of maximizing each pupil's potential and providing a fulfilling working environment for its staff. All staff are fully exceptionally hard working and fully committed to the school's strong boarding ethos.
- 5.8 The leadership of pastoral care is excellent; housemasters and housemistresses are well led by the strategic leadership team, who are all readily available to offer support and guidance. School policies relating to boarding and good practice are faithfully implemented, but do not prevent each house having its own individual character. Housemasters and housemistresses have differing styles of approach, and each house is fiercely proud of its unique ethos. Senior pupils are effective leaders within the boarding communities and within the school as a whole; they care for younger house members, setting a caring tone and high standards by example. This is a major strength of the school.

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

- 5.9 Relationships between the school and parents are excellent. Parents are well informed; they are confident that the school will respond quickly and effectively to any concerns about their children. Reports are sent on a regular basis and are helpful and informative, with contributions on all aspects of life at the school.
- 5.10 The response to the parental questionnaire was overwhelmingly positive. Parents agreed that the school is excellent in all aspects and there were no areas of significant concern. Parents are confident that pupils get help when needed on a day-to-day basis, that the range of activities is excellent and that they are well informed and involved in the school. They receive all the information that is required. Inspectors agreed with parents' positive views.
- 5.11 There is a thriving parent/teacher organisation which meets regularly and runs social and fund-raising events such as garden parties. Parents wholeheartedly subscribe to the ethos of the school and thoroughly approve of the education which their children are receiving. The school makes frequent contact, for example aiming to contact the parents of new pupils within the first week to report on their progress. Parents feel fully involved in their children's education despite their distance from school; they also visit the school for a wide range of school events.
- 5.12 The school has an appropriate complaints policy and the sample of correspondence scrutinised showed that it deals promptly with any concerns raised.

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 members of staff, and with the chair of governors and another governor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended 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 Ian Newton	Reporting Inspector
Mr Garry Binks	Head of Department and Day Housemaster, HMC school
Mr Marcus Cliff Hodges	Deputy Warden and Head of Boys' School, HMC School
Mr Stuart Nettleship	Senior Master, GSA School
Mrs Gwendoline Randall	Former Head, HMC School