INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Wellingborough School

The preparatory and pre-preparatory schools were inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of the School	**Wellingborough School**
DCSF Number	**928/6010**
Registered Charity Number	**1101485**
Address	**Irthlingborough Road, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire NN8 2BX.**
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Headmaster	**Mr Garry Bowe**
Chair of Governors	**Mr Jerry Higgins**
Age Range	**13 to 18**
Gender	**Mixed**
Inspection Dates	**16th to 19th March 2009**

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009.

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 Wellingborough School is a fully co-educational day school situated on the outskirts of the town of Wellingborough. It was founded in 1595 as a boys' school and became co-educational in the 1970s. The school serves mainly a semi-rural population and draws pupils from an area within a radius of approximately 25 miles. It occupies an attractive and relatively spacious site along with the pre-preparatory (pre-prep) and preparatory (prep) schools, all being accountable to the same governing body. The current headmaster was appointed after the previous inspection, which occurred in 2003, and has been in post for five years; he is head of the three schools. Since 1999, improvements at the school include significant investment in information and communication technology (ICT), the music school and the art extension, and major refurbishment of the houses, in particular Weymouth and Cripps. The science and mathematics buildings have also been renovated. In addition, a programme of redecoration and refurbishment has been carried out in many other areas of the school. The school is part of the East Midlands Consortium of schools.

1.2 At the time of the inspection, the senior school had 424 pupils (186 girls and 238 boys) on roll between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. One-hundred and fifty–one pupils are in the sixth form. The pupils come from mainly middle-class and professional families. Almost all the pupils in the prep school transfer to the senior school at the age of thirteen, without a specific examination. External candidates entering at that age take the school's entrance test papers in English, mathematics, science and, where appropriate, French, or the Common Entrance examination. Candidates applying to join the school in the sixth form are required to have passed a minimum of six GCSE subjects. The offer of a place for sixth-form entry is based upon interview, a reference from the pupil's current school and predicted grades of a minimum of 4Bs and 2Cs at GCSE, with an expectation of at least B grades in those subjects to be taken at Advanced (A) level. Transfers into Year 12 from other schools are decided on individual cases and related to pupils' ability to fit into the curriculum offered at Wellingborough.

1.3 The majority of pupils continue from Year 11 into the sixth form. Thereafter, almost all go on to higher education, usually to the university of their choice. Some pupils complete a GAP year between school and university.

1.4 The ability range of the pupils on entry to the school is relatively wide, but standardised test results indicate that the ability profile of the school's intake is well above the national average, so that, if pupils are performing in line with their abilities, GCSE results will be well above the average for all maintained schools but below the average for maintained selective schools. The ability profile of the sixth form is above the national average for pupils embarking on A-level courses, so the expectation is of results above the average for maintained schools. Seventy-eight pupils are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), of whom twenty-two pupils receive specialist learning support; no pupil has a statement of special educational needs. No pupils are identified by the school as having English as an additional language (EAL), though a few do come from homes in which a second language is spoken. A significant proportion of pupils are of white English background.

1.5 The school's aims are summed up in its mission statement, which reads, "The philosophy of Wellingborough School places learning at the heart of a challenging education which promotes achievement through active involvement. It seeks to develop self-awareness and a sense of responsibility, values both individuality and altruism, and fosters the spirit of

community and commitment which have been traditional to the school for over 400 years. The aim is to create a safe and happy environment in which pupils are given the best possible opportunity to learn and develop."

1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

2.1 The school's broad and balanced curriculum provides a good educational experience for its pupils and offers opportunities suited to their interests, aptitudes and needs. The curriculum is fully consistent with the school's aims and ethos and prepares pupils thoroughly for their journey through school life and beyond. Provision has been strengthened since the last inspection and now has a better academic programme and an even stronger enrichment programme.

2.2 In Year 9, the range of subjects includes those of the National Curriculum, with science being taught as the three separate sciences: biology, physics and chemistry. In addition, pupils study religious studies (RS), personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), Spanish and Latin. The PSHCE programme, taught from Years 9 to 11 includes sex education, citizenship, the importance of values and economic well being. Throughout, the course emphasises social and leadership skills, thus reflecting the school's aims and ethos, and makes provision for careers advice at appropriate times. In Years 10 and 11, there is a core of English, mathematics, a modern foreign language, games and the sciences plus a further three subjects chosen by the pupils. The school endeavours to meet pupils' requests for particular options but here and in Years 12 and 13, where twenty-four optional subjects are offered, this is not always possible. In the sixth form, all pupils extend their AS-level and A-level studies with an attractive array of enrichment courses, which include life skills.

2.3 The school's good approach to equal opportunities ensures that all pupils develop effective skills in listening and speaking, especially through their study of English and the foreign languages, and numeracy through subjects such as mathematics. They are enabled to make good progress in scientific and technological skills through their study of science, ICT and design and technology (DT). Physical education (PE), games and outdoor pursuits provide for their physical development and subjects such as music, art and drama make a strong contribution to their creative development.

2.4 The provision for pupils with LDD is outstanding. A full, independent review of learning support provision was undertaken recently and its recommendations followed. The new learning support centre is well equipped. Careful screening through standardised tests and reports from class teachers means that pupils needing help are identified early. Those who need extra support are listed internally online and thus made known to their teachers. This information also contains a pupil profile and the help needed. Assistance is available for individuals or small groups where necessary in the learning support centre, and the setting arrangements enable class teachers in several subjects to pitch work at the right level, although not all do this successfully. None of the very few pupils from homes where there is a second language requires special provision. The most able pupils are appropriately challenged in class, as observed by those studying further mathematics in the sixth form, and also encouraged to take on external challenges such as in music and the mathematics Olympiads.

2.5 The school's curriculum policy is clear, emphasises the school's values and aims, and provides helpful guidance for staff. The autonomy given to heads of department leads to some variation in provision, demonstrated by the differences in the contents of departmental handbooks and variations in the details of planning. Few, for example, contain guidance on how to help pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

2.6 An outstanding element in the school's provision is the enrichment programme, which successfully extends pupils' experiences. All pupils and the great majority of staff are involved in the programme, which embraces an impressive range of lunchtime activities. These opportunities are greatly valued by pupils. In the sixth form, pupils have the opportunity to extend their experience through enrichment during the normal timetabled time. The programme is supplemented by a number of after-school clinics in various subjects for pupils from Year 9 onwards. In addition, the extra-curricular programme offers plenty of sport, drama and musical opportunities, the last including individual instrumental lessons as well as ensemble work. A fine performance of the 'Blues Band' was observed by inspectors in an assembly. Sport is taken seriously and is encouraged with a regular programme of coaching opportunities, fixtures and tours abroad. Pupils also have the prospect of travel to different countries connected with their studies in a variety of subjects, which helps to broaden their cultural awareness. The combined cadet force (CCF), the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, and Young Enterprise companies thrive, encouraging pupils to see a role in society. The school's 'share' club, in which pupils invest in actual companies, is also highly successful, featuring in the national press very recently.

2.7 Pupils are successfully prepared for the next stages of their education and adult life. The links between the prep school and the senior school are mostly good, with prep school pupils being taught by some of the senior school staff and using some of the senior school facilities. The school accepts, however, that not enough is currently done to involve the heads of subjects across the schools in joint discussions about pupils' learning. The careers programme is designed to help pupils select GCSE subjects and AS-level courses and further support in the sixth form provides useful information about higher education. However, the delivery of the programme comes from a variety of sources and lacks cohesion. The arrangements for sixth-form work experience are also not sufficiently formalised.

2.8 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

2.9 Pupils learn and achieve well in relation to their abilities and they make effective progress during the time they are in school. They achieve good results in public examinations, as was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils are keen learners, an outcome of the school's efforts to achieve its aim to promote achievement through active involvement, and they respond well to their teachers.

2.10 In lessons observed, progress and learning were strong, with several examples of outstanding achievement. Pupils' exercise books revealed good, very well-presented work and several examples of effective independent study. This was particularly so in research projects in history and geography, where note-taking was also well organised. Pupils are articulate, as shown clearly in a Year 11 DT lesson where pupils used technical vocabulary with confidence. They are good listeners and read fluently. They write well, at length and creatively, demonstrating good ability to think and reason. Work in exercise books is mostly well organised, though some sixth-form folders proved the exception. Pupils have high expectations of themselves and of their teachers.

2.11 Pupils handle number, problems and mathematical concepts exceptionally well. In a Year 13 lesson in further mathematics, for example, pupils showed excellent reasoning skills when using a spreadsheet to explain values, and went on to produce some neat explanatory graphs. Pupils use ICT well, as observed in a Year 12 life skills lesson, and the use of inter-active whiteboards by a number of teachers is adding to pupils' experience and confidence in the use of technology.

2.12 Pupils show the ability to discuss and make a case, and they are prepared to take responsibility for their studies, as seen in the creative subjects of art, music and drama. Pupils enjoy the tasks set and apply themselves successfully; they are keen to achieve. They behave well and have first-rate attitudes to study. Pupils work effectively in groups and individually, as observed in a number of lessons, and are prepared to accept the rules of the game, as observed in PE and games.

2.13 In relation to their abilities, pupils do well in public examinations. During the last three years for which there is national comparative data, results in GCSE and A level were respectively well above and above the averages for all maintained schools and at both levels were in line with the averages for maintained selective schools. Standardised measures of progress indicate that achievement up to GCSE has been above the average for pupils of similar ability and that performance at A level has been consistent with the level of attainment in GCSE. The commitment to equal access for all pupils ensures that there is little noticeable difference in the progress of boys and girls, or, in most instances, less relative progress among those pupils with LDD than that achieved by their peers.

2.14 In the wide array of activities which are available outside the curriculum, pupils have performed well, and on occasions exceptionally so. For example, in music, a number of pupils have reached good standards in instrumental examinations, several recently gaining Grade 7 and Grade 8 with merit or distinction. The more able have played in county ensembles such as orchestra, choir and jazz groups. The Chapel Choir has also performed in Manchester and Lichfield Cathedrals in the last 12 months. In sport, the school has produced 22 county representatives in girls' hockey and won the county championships at each age from under-15 to under-18. Pupils have won national honours in girls' cricket and in gymnastics. Boys have also performed well, with several winning county cricket and rugby caps and gaining national representation at rugby. A host of pupils have achieved well in the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards and in Young Enterprise. Indeed, Young Enterprise teams have been successful enough to appear on radio and television as a result of winning county finals.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

2.15 Pupils' development in relation to their moral and social awareness is outstanding; in relation to their spiritual and cultural understanding it is good. This is an improvement from the time of the previous report and well in line with the school's aims to develop self-awareness and a sense of responsibility, and to encourage individuality. The values of Christianity are seen as important to the school and it seeks to pass these on to its pupils.

2.16 Spiritual development is good. Throughout their time at school, pupils grow in confidence through the excellent quality of their relationships with others. It is clear in the way they treat each other that they value others and recognise in them a spiritual side to their humanity. They also grow in self-esteem, a result of the encouragement they receive from their peers and the staff. In PSHCE they discuss values and demonstrate an understanding of materialism and its impact on the spiritual life, and in RS their understanding of important issues related to the beliefs and practices of different faiths develops. Insufficient use is made of the chapel and chaplaincy to help pupils extend their spiritual experience or enable them to spend periods of quiet reflection, and this is an unresolved issue from the last inspection.

2.17 Pupils have an extremely strong moral commitment. This is demonstrated well by their behaviour around the school, their respect for the feelings of others and their understanding of moral values. They respect rules and so rarely challenge authority or bully their peers. Pupils are willing to talk about what is right or wrong even when it concerns the justice of the way teachers are seen to administer rewards and sanctions. Moral understanding was also seen in the way they responded in a stimulating Year 13 biology lesson delving into aspects of learned behaviour through the work of Pavlov, Skinner and Kohler. Their studies in history encourage them to discuss the moral issues raised by war, and a good debate in a Year 10 English lesson on 'This house believes that it is wrong for a person to take his/her own life', a theme mirrored in a Year 9 RS lesson on the sanctity of life, encouraged pupils to share views on the morality of situations that are currently in the news. Pupils recognise a responsibility to those who are less well off than they are and contribute generously to charities at home and abroad. Their involvement in activities related to raising money takes time as well as a desire to do good, and this they give freely.

2.18 They develop excellent social attitudes. Senior pupils take on a range of responsibilities that enable the school to operate as a successful social body. They spend time with younger pupils, offering guidance and care when it is needed. Younger pupils recognise the importance of this and grow in their understanding of the need for social commitment, so that as they proceed through school they too are willing to take on such responsibilities. Through PSHCE pupils learn something of political institutions and economic well-being, which they put into practice through the school council and activities such as Young Enterprise. The suggestions from the school council are not always adopted, but even here they learn of the frustrations of being involved in social and, to some extent, political activities. Pupils respect school rules, seeing the need for order if social cohesion is to be achieved. They also develop their understanding of the benefits to society of people following a healthy lifestyle, encouraged by discussion and their experiences of healthy choice in the school dining room.

2.19 Pupils recognise that in society there are different people with various beliefs and traditions. In history and geography, they learn about the beliefs and practices of people in other lands and times, as observed in a Year 9 geography lesson on China's 'one-child policy', and in RE of those with other faiths. Their charitable activities further their understanding of peoples in different parts of the world, such as Africa and Eastern Europe, and their visits to Iceland, Germany and France add to their understanding. Some of these experiences reveal themselves through their work in music, drama and art. Art work, in particular, shows pupils wrestling with different forms and seeking to learn more about the artists responsible for them. There is little on display in the school, however, to raise pupils' awareness of the many gifted people who come from the countries that the pupils seek to help, or to prepare them for living in a multi-cultural society. Pupils develop an increased understanding of their own British culture through the various visits they make to theatres and art galleries, the pupils they meet in a variety of circumstances from other schools, and their involvement in drama and music.

2.20 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

2.21 The overall quality of teaching is good; it is often outstanding. Teachers are knowledgeable, plan effectively, and successfully encourage pupils to learn, to persevere and to produce good quality work. This fulfils the school's aim to place learning at the heart of a challenging education. The picture is one that is generally stronger than at the time of the previous inspection. Assessment is also good. The care with which most staff mark pupils' work shows pupils how they might improve, whilst helping them see the progress they are making.

2.22 Teachers are knowledgeable and generally keep up a good pace in their teaching during lessons, giving pupils little opportunity to lose interest and waste their time. They plan individual lessons well, indicating the objectives, which are usually linked to previous learning, and outlining the way the lesson will develop. They use a variety of different resources to keep their teaching stimulating and range of suitable strategies to encourage learning. In a Year 10 English lesson, for example, pupils enjoyed a formal debate, and in a Year 10 drama lesson pupils benefited from the paired work in which they engaged. Teachers also use effective questioning techniques. In foreign languages the target language is used to great effect. It is common to see pupils working individually, as in music and art, and in groups as in PE and business studies.

2.23 Teachers seek to ensure that pupils of all abilities make good progress in their studies, making good use of the setting arrangements that exist in certain subjects. Work of varying difficulty, however, is not always set for pupils of different ability within the same class. Even so, those pupils with LDD benefit from the individual attention teachers are prepared to give them when the need arises.

2.24 Teachers make good use of ICT in several subjects to develop learning, for example geography, mathematics and science, but little use is made in others. Inter-active whiteboards that are present in a number of classrooms are used well.

2.25 The quality of assessment is good and is supported well by a clear and helpful school policy. Pupils' exercise books demonstrated that in most subjects teachers mark pupils' work regularly and in line with the school policy. Often there were useful and detailed comments, designed to show pupils how to make further progress. This was evident in English, modern foreign languages and the humanities. The outcomes of assessment contribute to teachers' planning and keep pupils well informed of how well they have achieved in a particular piece of work. Teachers spend time in lessons informally assessing pupils' work, giving feedback and helping them to make progress. General targets are set for pupils, usually with examinations in mind, but the closer monitoring of pupils' progress and the setting of short-term targets are not so evident, an issue recognised by the school.

2.26 The school collects a good deal of data on pupils through a range of standardised tests and has analyses showing the progress that pupils are making year by year. These results are being used increasingly to help predict a pupil's future performance. The school has begun to use the results of these tests to track pupils' progress and set short-term targets but this is still in its infancy.

2.27 Pupils respond to the overall good quality of teaching and assessment well. They relate positively to their teachers and contribute to the strong work ethic in every class. The assessment information they receive and the reports that are sent to their parents are detailed enough to help pupils and parents recognise progress or otherwise. In interviews with inspectors, pupils said that they appreciated the feedback they received and that it often encouraged them in their work. Consequently, pupils apply themselves well intellectually,

physically and creatively, are interested in their work and are prepared to think and learn for themselves. They behave well and have first-rate attitudes to study.

2.28 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

3.1 The overall quality of pastoral care, welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The structures and measures used by the school to promote the health, welfare and safety of the pupils are first-rate. This maintains the judgments of the previous report and the school's aim to create a safe and happy environment in which the pupils can learn.

3.2 The pastoral structure, based on a house system, is outstanding; it ensures that the pupils feel safe and cared for. Housemasters and housemistresses, along with form tutors, take immediate responsibility for the pupils but can turn to more senior staff for further support if it is needed. A member of the senior leadership team is head of sixth form and the second deputy head has pastoral responsibility for Years 9 to 11. The senior deputy head has responsibility for pastoral care throughout the school. Medical staff are also present to support when necessary. Despite such a well organised structure, a noticeable number of pupils, in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, expressed the view that the school does not listen to them and that they would not know who to go to if they had a problem. However, in conversations with pupils formally and informally, inspectors found that the vast majority of pupils feel secure and well cared for, could state clearly which staff they could contact if they required help, and feel that staff take an interest in their well being. In one instance, a pupil said she had switched to this school from another because "I knew I would be well looked after here".

3.3 School rules are clear and known to pupils. Sanctions are used when the need arises and pupils know that a detention is likely to follow the breaking of a rule. Inspectors found that relationships between pupils and pupils and staff are exceedingly good and that there is a general air of well-being throughout the school. The school has a well constructed anti-bullying policy and cyber-bullying policy and takes every precaution to prevent bullying in school. If any cases of bullying are reported, the school takes appropriate and decisive action. Some pupils in the pupil questionnaire and in pupil interviews expressed a concern that both rewards and punishments were not always fair but acknowledged that this could now be raised at the school council. Staff supervision is adequate at break times, and the extensive site is managed appropriately.

3.4 An appropriate child protection policy is in place; the child protection officer and both teaching and support staff have had recent training. Risk assessments are appropriate for both on- and off-site activities, and procedures concerning safety in relation to fire and electrical equipment are in place. The local fire service has carried out regular checks. Recent work to improve the quality of the water supplies has been very successful, eliminating where possible standing water in tanks.

3.5 The procedures for registration are outstanding. The school has a very effective system for dealing with pupils who are late or absent and parents are informed, by telephone, within a short while of any unexpected absence. Latecomers and visitors are conscientiously recorded. The procedures for admissions are also carefully documented and followed.

3.6 The health and safety committee is chaired by the bursar and meets three times a year. It addresses important issues, including those related to fire precautions and electricity checks. All staff have, within their teaching contracts, responsibility for the health and safety of the pupils, staff and visitors. The issue raised at the last inspection concerning the access of cars onto the main school site is dealt with as safely as possible by careful organisation of

pedestrian crossings and pathways. However, the school's sustained efforts to obtain planning permission from the Local Authority for a new access have so far been unsuccessful.

3.7 Medical provision in school is good. Two nurses provide an excellent service for the pupils and the medical room has good facilities. The nurses are on-site for midweek matches and, when required, for weekends. Other cover at weekends is provided by St John's Ambulance Service.

3.8 School meals are based on a healthy diet. They are served from clean and well-ordered kitchens in an impressive dining hall. They are popular with the pupils, who appreciate their quality and variety. The school provides support for any pupils with a disability through its accessibility plan, in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.

3.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

3.10 The school has outstanding links with parents and the community, which is better than at the time of the last inspection. Parents are very supportive of the school and their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire was overwhelmingly positive. The school makes a very positive contribution to the local community, allowing its facilities to be used by a wide variety of organisations, and significant amounts of money are raised each year for a variety of international and local charities. The school has done much in seeking to achieve its aim of fostering the spirit of community and commitment which have been traditional to the school for over four hundred years.

3.11 Communication with parents is excellent. The school produces an informative *Guide to the School*, and an attractive and detailed school prospectus. The *Guide* is distributed to all new parents and annually to all parents. The school's website is equally informative, providing all relevant information, and includes the headmaster's 'blog', which informs parents of school events that have happened or are about to happen. The recently introduced 'Clarion Call' text messaging service alerts parents to important messages from the school and is said to have proved especially useful during the recent bad weather.

3.12 A small minority of parents feel that they are not encouraged to participate in the life of the school but, in light of the number of parents they met helping the school, inspectors found no evidence to support this. Neither did they find that the amounts of homework are excessive, another issue identified by some parents. Parents are invited to help the school in a number of ways and many do so. In particular, they support the school's drama productions, sporting fixtures and musical events. The Wellingborough Senior School Parents Association (WSSPA) is very active and raises considerable funds for a variety of causes. Most recently, parents have raised money for a new minibus and interactive whiteboards. The WSSPA works with the school to produce an informative newsletter for parents, which promotes the achievements of senior school pupils.

3.13 Parents receive regular written reports and updates on their children's progress. The reports are well written, detailing strengths and highlighting areas for development. Parental responses to the questionnaire indicate that parents believe they have a good understanding of the progress being made by their children. Regular parents' evenings take place at appropriate times of the year and provide very good opportunities for formal face-to-face discussion between parents and teachers, which enable parents to learn how they might support their children.

3.14 The school handles the concerns of parents with due care. Records of all significant communications from parents are kept by the school. An appropriate complaints procedure is in place and a copy is available to parents on request. Formal complaints, of which there are very few, are handled in line with this policy.

3.15 The excellent links with the local community and those further afield make an effective contribution to the pupils' education and their personal development. Visits to local theatres and historical and geographical places of interest broaden pupils' experience. Visits abroad to the First World War battlefields, to France, Berlin and Iceland, for example, also raise pupils' awareness of community. The planned joint netball and rugby tour to New Zealand, partly financed by money raised by parents, will extend some pupils' understanding of life in the southern hemisphere. Commitment to fundraising in support of charities is high and pupils, usually through the school council, are encouraged to suggest appropriate beneficiaries. The most recent was the national 'Red Nose Day'. Significant amounts of money are raised each year for a variety of international projects in Africa and Eastern Europe, as well as more local charities such as Marie Curie, McMillan and Riding for the Disabled. In one assembly observed by inspectors. the impact of pupils' donations was seen on a video in which a former pupil demonstrated how helpful the school is to a local school in Zimbabwe. The school is keen for the local community to make use of its facilities and has established an enterprise office, which has been responsible for a dramatic increase in the amount of community usage. The school lets its premises to a wide range of organisations, varying from sports clubs to orchestras as well as hosting important conferences, summer camps and even weddings. In addition to raising the profile of the school, money raised goes to maintaining and improving existing facilities to support pupils' learning.

3.16 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 is committed to the school's philosophy and aims, and supports the school effectively in its efforts to achieve them, a judgement in line with the previous report.

4.2 Governance has a sound structure. It is a company limited by guarantee and governors are members of an overarching council as well as of the governing body. The responsibilities of these two bodies are clearly defined. This is not the case with regard to the six committees of the governing body, each of which works hard on behalf of the school. Links and tiers of responsibilities are not always clear, although the chairman currently supplies a personal link between committees. The bursar reports directly to the governors rather than to the headmaster, a practice which is becoming less common nationally in the light of the executive responsibility borne by heads of schools.

4.3 The governing body is well led and comprises of governors from different backgrounds and with skills fit for the school's purpose. Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities to the school, ensuring that finances are spent wisely and that the school's provision benefits. The relatively recently formed education committee oversees the school's education provision and the financial committee provides the resources to ensure that good quality staff are appointed and that staff have adequate resources.

4.4 The chairman and other governors visit the school often, and the chairman is well known to the staff. Governors provide advice and stimulus for growth. The chairman, in particular, devotes much time to the school, although he recognises the importance of not interfering with the daily management of the school and of not eroding the executive leadership of the headmaster.

4.5 The governors have a member responsible for and trained in child protection and they have keen oversight of the health and safety of the pupils. They are kept well informed about the school's progress from the reports from the headmaster and bursar. Governors take steps to receive appropriate training. They have undertaken a self review, resulting in their decision to tackle some of the areas identified for change and development.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

4.6 The school is well led and managed. This is in line with the previous inspection. The headmaster has a clear vision for the school and is successfully guiding it towards the achievement of its aims.

4.7 The headmaster has worked hard with other members of the school to create a very strong ethos, and he is well supported in this by the leadership team. Although several recent appointments have been made to senior management, the leadership team collaborates effectively, meets regularly and is helping the school take on new initiatives and make progress. The annual reviews carried out by the headmaster and the senior and second deputy heads are successful in stimulating progress. Housemistresses and housemasters are effective in carrying out their responsibilities. The leadership and management of departments are also generally effective, though there is no systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating within departments or in the drawing up of departmental handbooks.

4.8 The school's professional development system is beginning to work well. The headmaster and bursar have external professional performance development interviews, though the system for other teaching staff has yet to become fully operational. There is no such system for the support staff. Each academic department has an in-service training budget and all staff, both academic and support staff, participate in a range of useful training, an improvement since the last inspection. The arrangements for newly qualified teachers are in line with those set down nationally and work well.

4.9 The school takes great care checking the suitability of staff, support staff and governors. All have had the appropriate enhanced CRB and other recruitment checks; a centralised register is accurately kept.

4.10 The school's five-year development plan provides a strategic approach to the school's progress, a response to the last inspection. It is well structured and regularly reviewed, and has the development of spiritual and moral awareness at its core. Its other priorities are also important to the school's development. Procedures and policies throughout the school are clear and appropriately detailed. They are known to staff and pupils and contribute to the smooth running of the daily life of the school.

4.11 The bursar, in consultation with the headmaster and his staff, ensures that teachers have appropriate resources. The newly refurbished library, in particular, provides an extremely good resource centre for pupils, in response to the last inspection. Accommodation is of good quality. The school has a generous supply of support staff who provide the underpinning which helps the school to run smoothly. They report directly to the bursar. They do not, however, have the benefit of regular meetings. The newly appointed human resources manager provides particular expertise, especially in the efficiency and effectiveness of the employment process and training.

4.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].

4.13 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 curriculum provides a good educational experience for the pupils. It is supported well by an outstanding range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities, although provision for careers guidance and work experience is not sufficiently coordinated or formalised. Pupils achieve well in relation to their abilities in class and in public examinations because they are keen learners and the quality of teaching is good and often outstanding. They are articulate, good listeners, read fluently and write effectively. Pupils handle number, problems and mathematical concepts exceptionally well. Pupils' social and moral development is outstanding and their spiritual and cultural understanding is good. The assessment of pupils' work is good and general targets are set for pupils, but the consistent tracking of pupils' progress is not yet fully developed. The overall quality of pastoral care, welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school has excellent links with parents and the community. The governing body effectively supports the school, which is well led and managed as a result of the headmaster's clear vision. The headmaster is effectively supported by the leadership team. The approach to monitoring and evaluating within subject departments is not sufficiently systematic, though middle management is generally effective.

5.2 In response to the recommendations of the last report the school has: greatly improved the school library and the facilities it offers; produced a five-year development plan that contains appropriate priorities; and made better arrangements for the professional development of staff. It has not resolved the issues of traffic passing through the school, despite significant efforts to gain planning permission, or of furthering the spiritual development of pupils by making more effective use of the chapel or the chaplaincy.

5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

5.4 In order to continue its improvement, the school should:

1. further develop the measures already begun to improve the quality of monitoring pupils' progress and setting meaningful short-term targets;

2. ensure that departments are more systematic in their approach to monitoring and evaluating their progress;

3. ensure that the coordination and organisation of careers guidance at all levels is improved and arrangements for work experience are more formalised;

4. ensure that the issues from the previous inspection concerning traffic arrangements and the more effective use of the chapel and chaplaincy, which remain unresolved, continue to be addressed.

5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

6.1 The inspection was carried out from 16th to 19th March 2009. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mr Terence Dillon	Reporting Inspector
Mr John Aguilar	Deputy Head, HMC school
Mrs Margaret Atkins	Head of Year, HMC school
Mrs Elizabeth Cairncross	Headmistress, HMC school
Mr David Elstone	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Michael Oliver	Houseparent, HMC school