

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### **The Old Rectory School**

Full Name of the School	<b>The Old Rectory School</b>
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Proprietors	<b>Mr Michael Murphy and Mrs Margaret Murphy</b>
Age Range	<b>7 to 13</b>
Gender	<b>Mixed</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> March 2009</b>

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 was carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate. The Ofsted report is available separately at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 The Old Rectory School is a privately-owned specialist co-educational day and boarding school for pupils from the ages of seven to thirteen. The school is dedicated to the teaching of pupils with dyslexia and related learning difficulties. It seeks to equip them with key skills in literacy and numeracy within a broad and balanced curriculum. By developing positive attitudes to, and effective strategies for, learning, it aims to provide an ethos where pupils are challenged and supported to achieve their personal best. The school aims to prepare each pupil for the next stage of their education, with the independence and confidence to plan for a successful future. The last inspection took place in 2003. Since that time developments have included improved accommodation and resources for art, information communication technology (ICT), design technology (DT), music and the library. Assessment systems have been further developed.
- 1.2 The school was founded in 1981 with the aim of supporting children with dyslexia to acquire the skills necessary to access and succeed in mainstream education. The school remains firm to this commitment today. The present owners took over the school in 1998. A governing body has been recently established to support the proprietors and headmistress by acting in an advisory capacity. The school occupies a large adapted Georgian rectory and coach house with additional buildings and accommodation. It is set in six acres of grounds and playing fields on the edge of a small rural Suffolk village twenty miles from the town of Ipswich.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection the school had 51 pupils on roll of whom 43 are boys and eight are girls. There are 26 pupils in total between the ages of seven and eleven in Years 3 to 6, and 25 pupils between the ages of eleven and thirteen in Years 7 and 8. The school provides accommodation for 32 full-time and three part-time boarders; 29 of these are boys and six are girls. No pupils have English as their second language. Virtually all pupils are British and less than a quarter are from different ethnic origins. All pupils have a professionally diagnosed profile of specific learning difficulty and receive specialist teaching support from the school; two pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- 1.4 Pupils can join the school in any year group. The process of admission is designed to select pupils whose specific learning difficulties encompass either or both dyslexia and dyspraxia. Although there is no strict limit for the time pupils attend the school, the average length of stay is two years. Pupils are grouped according to their ability and social needs within a key stage, not by the normal division of year groups. The school does not submit pupils for any form of external assessment. Pupils in appropriate year groups have the opportunity to undertake practice examinations in preparation for any entrance tests. The ability profile of pupils is in line with the national average with some above and others below, although the nature of the pupils' learning difficulties often masks the true extent of their abilities.
- 1.5 Pupils encompass a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, although the majority are from an independent school background. Most pupils attend the school from East Anglia and surrounding areas although some attend from further afield and a few have parents who are based overseas.
- 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 provides a good quality of educational experience for its pupils which is consistent with its declared aims and philosophy. Since the last inspection, developments have included extending the curriculum, to include more cross-curricular and topic work.
- 2.2 The curriculum is wide-ranging and balanced. The teaching of pupils in mixed year groups, and through very small tutorial groups, allows them to work successfully and confidently at their own ability level. The development of literacy and numeracy skills present significant challenges for many pupils because of the nature of their difficulties. However, the appropriate and strong emphasis on these skills provides a secure foundation for their future learning. The introduction of laptops for use by the older pupils enables them to work with greater independence, and overcome problems with written presentation and technical accuracy. Numeracy skills are effectively developed by individual and small group lessons, and through the introduction of a commercial mathematics scheme. The content and teaching of science has been enriched through the focus on scientific enquiry and investigation, a significant improvement since the last inspection. The improved use of information and communication technology (ICT) has led to more opportunities for pupils' co-operative and independent learning, and prepares them better for greater independence in their later years, a recommendation of the previous inspection report. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 were totally engaged working on a spelling programme at their own level in a well-prepared ICT lesson. Appropriate attention is given to the pupils' aesthetic and creative development, through music, art, DT and drama which contribute significantly to the pupils' all round personal development. All pupils learn Spanish during their time at the school. The outdoor programme for physical development (PE) is fostered through a range of sports such as football, swimming, rounders and tennis. Indoor PE activities are more limited due to the lack of on-site facilities.
- 2.3 Pupils' experience of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is integrated successfully into the curriculum and is enhanced by a range of extra-curricular activities. PSHE reflects the aims and ethos of the school well, by emphasising the need to give pupils a supportive learning environment, and opportunities to develop their confidence and self-esteem. They receive support and guidance from a wide variety of sources, including assembly, circle time and through their daily life in school.
- 2.4 Pupils enjoy a range of activities and clubs such as cooking, karate, gardening, knitting and origami, both at lunchtime and after school. Many particularly enjoy the school's long-established fire crew activities where they learn about the maintenance and use of the school's own fire engines under the guidance of volunteer fire officers from the local fire department. These activities, together with visits to places of interest, such as the theatre, local events and science workshops contribute well to pupils' educational experience and achievement and help raise their self-esteem. A happy friendly atmosphere is fostered throughout the school in which pupils flourish, because they feel secure and valued.
- 2.5 The curriculum is effectively planned. Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has been extended and is now based on a three-year cycle of topics so that connections between the subjects can be made to reinforce the pupils' learning and transfer knowledge. The development of a whole-school approach to curriculum planning provides coherence and consistency in schemes of work and the provision of resources and activities appropriate to the learning styles and needs of the pupils. The deputy head maintains an overview of the curriculum throughout the school.

- 2.6 The school makes good provision for the specific needs of its pupils by ensuring tasks are planned according to need and ability, and a range of multi-sensory teaching and learning approaches is employed. Teachers are well informed of pupils' individual needs through carefully prepared individual education plans (IEPs) which are used effectively to assess and guide pupils' progress. Pupils are carefully prepared for each stage of their education and equipped with the necessary skills for their transfer to their next school. They are taught to be self-sufficient and to use their time well. For those moving to a boarding school environment, their experience of boarding ensures they are encouraged to become independent and that they are confident about the challenges of living away from home.
- 2.7 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

### **Pupils' Learning and Achievements**

- 2.8 The school is successful in meeting its aim of supporting pupils with specific learning difficulties to acquire the confidence and skills necessary to access and succeed in mainstream education. Given the nature and extent of the pupils' learning difficulties, their achievement is good overall. The school has maintained the good quality of learning and achievements noted in the last inspection.
- 2.9 Pupils develop appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding in the subjects and activities provided. They make good progress in the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills and the transfer of these skills to other curriculum areas. All pupils have experienced delay in the development of aspects of their literacy, numeracy, comprehension or critical thinking skills, but as pupils grow in self-esteem, they become more confident orally, and apply their knowledge, skills and understanding successfully, particularly in practical and creative subjects. Drama lessons and art work displayed around the school demonstrate the creativity and artistic ability of many pupils. In science, pupils show the ability to conduct a fair test and make predictions and critical evaluations. Many pupils show efficient and confident use of ICT for independent research, to consolidate spelling, develop auditory discrimination and to draft and proof-read work.
- 2.10 The attainment of pupils in lessons was good in the majority of lessons observed. Many pupils arrive at the school having experienced failure or rejection elsewhere. The nurturing environment of the school, small class sizes, individual tutorial support and specialist teachers trained in specific learning difficulties combine to enable pupils to achieve their potential. Written and oral language skills develop through regular and systematic reinforcement and, as self-esteem and confidence develop, pupils become more articulate, confident in asking questions and able to develop study skills and strategies appropriate to their individual learning needs. Their achievement improves in many curriculum areas.
- 2.11 Standardised tests of reading, mathematics and written language abilities and skills, administered each year, indicate that pupils make good progress during their time at the school. They develop the skills and independence to return to mainstream education, needing less individualised, specialist support. The school does not use national tests as a method of assessment but work in English, mathematics and science is assessed against national curriculum criteria with pupils showing good progression and achievement in relation to their abilities and specific learning difficulties.
- 2.12 Despite the small size of the school, pupils have the opportunity to be involved in inter-school sporting events for football, cricket and netball. They experience success in a number of individual and group activities. Some pupils achieve high grades in instrumental and singing examinations whilst others are successful in activities such as horse-riding or karate. Recently a group of Year 8 pupils became joint winners of a mathematics challenge held at a

local college. Pupils have moved on to other schools with art and drama scholarships. Participation and achievement in such activities further develop pupils' self-worth, skills and natural abilities.

- 2.13 Pupils develop effective study skills and positive attitudes to work in their time at the school. Many pupils need and are given frameworks to structure written tasks, support and encouragement with the presentation and organisation of work, and strategies to help with spelling, concentration, and the development of reading accuracy and comprehension. As a result of the support given, they gradually develop greater independence in learning.
- 2.14 The majority of pupils are well motivated and enjoy their lessons. Despite significant difficulties they show perseverance and a desire to succeed. Some pupils find social interaction difficult, but work well co-operatively, in cookery club and games lessons for instance. Pupils were observed working well together in pairs and in larger groups in many subjects, showing respect for the ideas and opinions of others, whilst being able to suggest an alternative point of view in an appropriate manner. Pupils are keen to participate in lunchtime activities and house and school teams. As was noted in the previous inspection, the quality of relationships among pupils and between pupils and staff is high, and this remains one of the key elements in the success of the school.

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils**

- 2.15 Pupils demonstrate good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness as it was at the time of the last inspection. The positive ethos of the school, together with carefully nurtured relationships, makes an important contribution to pupils' personal development. Consequently pupils grow up to be confident and have respect for others. This meets the school's aims effectively.
- 2.16 Pupils' spiritual awareness is developing well. Pupils develop their self-esteem and self-confidence through good opportunities provided in lessons and activities for pupils to discover new experiences. Pupils in a drama activity displayed considerable confidence when they gave instruction to other members of their group. This reflects the good support they receive from teachers who respect them as individuals. Pupils think carefully about their own feelings when reacting to various situations that may arise. Year 7 pupils reflect on their personal experience of being dyslexic and suggest strategies to cope when moving to a new school. Self-esteem is raised successfully by the emphasis on praise being given during lessons and in public. Pupils are proud to be presented with certificates, or to win house points for the effort they make with their work; they understand their contribution towards the cup which is presented to the house with the most points. Religious education, PSHE, assemblies and circle time encourage questioning and curiosity by opening pupils' minds and eyes to experience what is in the world around them. During assembly, pupils were thoughtful and reflective when they listened to a talk from the local vicar about the Japanese cross commemorating the bombing of Hiroshima, and the effects it had on those who were left. The religious dimension of spiritual development allows the opportunity for pupils to explore different faiths and beliefs.
- 2.17 Pupils have a good moral sense and distinguish clearly between right and wrong; older pupils sensibly shared their thoughts and feelings about the difference during a discussion on conflict in the world. School rules serve as a constant reminder of the high standards of behaviour that are expected. Pupils' appreciate they are necessary and think the sanctions for any misdemeanours are mostly appropriate. Pupils are loyal to their school and demonstrate a caring, courteous, kind and respectful attitude to one another, visitors and their teachers.

- 2.18 Teachers and care staff provide positive role models of behaviour in line with the school's aims and ethos which helps to foster the good social awareness of the pupils. As pupils move through the school they become increasingly confident and able to interact well with one another and the staff. They are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and for others, both in the boarding houses and within the school. Pupils have the opportunity to stand for election and to represent their group on the school council. Older pupils gain valuable leadership skills when undertaking duties as prefects. Throughout the school, pupils show a developing understanding of public institutions, democracy and of issues beyond the school community, including interpersonal relationships. Such issues are fostered appropriately through the PSHE and citizenship programmes. Pupils said they welcomed these additions to the curriculum.
- 2.19 Pupils develop a good knowledge and understanding of their own culture and that of others. They have many opportunities to learn about and appreciate cultural traditions across the curriculum. Subjects such as geography bring pupils into contact with people's different backgrounds and environments. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 took part in a stimulating discussion on the difference and similarities in culture between South Africa and England, and what it would have been like to have lived during the time of apartheid. Art and DT lessons provide many opportunities for looking at the work of other cultures, and pupils are able to experiment in a similar style. Pupils throughout the school are aware of the need for tolerance, understanding and fairness.
- 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 Teaching promotes the aims of the school effectively and is usually of a good quality. Teachers are successful in enabling pupils of all abilities to acquire and consolidate new knowledge and understanding and to develop effective study skills. They know their pupils well and use their extensive knowledge of their individual needs and potential to help them move forward overcoming any difficulties. The good standards noted in the last inspection have been maintained.
- 2.22 Intellectual, physical and creative effort is fostered appropriately. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils and match tasks and resources to the needs and ability of each pupil well. A thinking skills programme is part of the curriculum for pupils of all ages and aims to foster independent and effective learning. Years 7 and 8 pupils demonstrated their ability to use analytical thinking skills for problem solving, managing to produce some highly creative solutions to everyday problems, such as how to reduce the number of cars on the road. Creative improvisation was observed in drama and music activities. Pupils showed skill and flair in the choice of materials and stitching when designing squares to be part of a group wall-hanging.
- 2.23 Relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Teachers encourage pupils to behave responsibly, not to call out and to listen carefully. They give pupils a great deal of encouragement and create a climate of praise which is conducive to learning and within which pupils feel confident. Consequently, pupils have the courage and capability to articulate their thoughts and knowledge because they feel secure and valued. Pupils see learning as fun and, despite the entrenched difficulties experienced by many, they show perseverance to complete tasks.
- 2.24 The majority of lessons are generally well planned and employ effective teaching methods. In a Year 7 English lesson, short targeted activities addressed individual literacy needs,

- developed understanding of adjectives, extended vocabulary, and linked into future spelling work. Lack of planning and pace in some lessons resulted in restless behaviour, and as a result, less progress was made. Teachers employ a wide range of teaching methods to meet the individual needs and learning styles of pupils. This is particularly evident in the tutorial programme where multi-sensory learning enables pupils to make significant progress. Effective teaching shows repetition, reinforcement and consolidation so that pupils become secure in new knowledge and skills.
- 2.25 Teaching demonstrates a good understanding of pupils' needs and prior attainments, and effective planning reflects this. The use of questioning by teachers is often used skilfully to check knowledge, increase pupils' understanding and develop their skills. Specialist teaching significantly enhances pupils' learning. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subjects they teach, and their enthusiasm was evident in lessons.
- 2.26 The school has developed coherent schemes of work in all curriculum areas. A system of curriculum review and monitoring is being developed to ensure consistency and progression across all subject areas. Class teachers show good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter taught and are skilful in developing approaches and resources to make lessons accessible to all pupils so that they can achieve success and enjoy a positive learning experience.
- 2.27 Resources to support pupils' learning are good. ICT provision is much improved since the last inspection and the effective use of ICT across the curriculum was observed, although not all classrooms had printers. A wide range of up-to-date literacy and numeracy support materials are available and text books were mostly of good quality. The library has been improved since the last inspection. It provides a warm and welcoming environment with a wide selection of fiction books together with a number of taped books and cassette players. Non-fiction books and the internet are available for independent research.
- 2.28 The annual re-assessment reports completed by an educational psychologist highlight pupil progress in the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Work scrutiny and pupil reports show the transfer of these skills to other curriculum areas. Detailed record keeping enables teachers to monitor pupils' needs and progress in their individual tutorial lessons. Half-termly reports and termly reviews of IEPs enable both teachers and pupils to reflect on work and progress. These assessments are clearly used to inform teachers about the next steps in learning and to set targets for the individual pupil. Written comments in the pupils' work in English and mathematics often address these IEP targets. In other subjects teachers are not consistent in the application of the school's marking policy. Whilst marking of pupils' work is mostly regular and often done alongside the pupil with comments given verbally, written comments do not always clearly identify how pupils can improve their work. Motivational stickers and stamps are used to reward and recognise effort and progress. Revised curriculum policy documentation is beginning to provide a basis for developing consistent whole school practice.
- 2.29 Tutors assess pupils' performance and progress in meeting personal learning targets each term as part of the IEP review process. Further assessment is undertaken for the end-of-term reports which evaluate pupils' performance against national curriculum levels. This information is then used when deciding on the pupil's next school placement. The annual re-assessments in the summer term provide standardised scores for both teachers and parents to indicate areas of progress as well as to identify areas for future focus. Internal transfer documentation completed at the end of each academic year ensures progression and continuity of provision.
- 2.30 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 quality of pastoral care, welfare, health and safety is satisfactory overall. Within this, pastoral care is good. The aims and ethos of the school, in seeking to improve the confidence and self-esteem of pupils to have the self-belief that they can succeed, pervades every aspect of school life. A feature of the parents' comments is their appreciation of the work of the staff in ensuring the needs of individuals are met and handled sensitively. The consistent and rigorous implementation of policies and procedures for welfare, health and safety of pupils are unsatisfactory in some significant areas, particularly with regard to welfare, health and safety and the boarding requirements.
- 3.2 The school provides good quality support and guidance for pupils and staff take an active and important role in this. New pupils settle in quickly. Small class sizes result in pupils developing a supportive relationship with their teachers. Pupils feel that they always have someone to talk to. Year 5 pupils consider the school to be the best they have ever been to because the teachers understand their difficulties and are always willing to listen and help them sort out problems. The housemasters and housemistresses are effective in maintaining a good quality of pastoral care. Although most have been recently appointed, they are developing a considerable knowledge of the pupils and carry out their duties responsibly.
- 3.3 Pupils show a mature self-awareness of their difficulties and value the help and support that the school provides. They are positive and happy in lessons and are friendly, courteous and polite. The school has many experienced and dedicated teachers who recognise the difficulties and potential of dyslexic pupils. Their expertise in the classroom helps to reduce the anger and frustration experienced by many pupils and trusting relationships develop.
- 3.4 Effective pastoral arrangements and policies set out the formal procedures and offer appropriate guidance for all staff within the school day. However, less clear guidance is available for boarding staff. Assemblies, circle time and PSHE lessons enhance a sense of community and good relationships and contribute to reinforcing positive self-esteem, mutual support and team work. The headmistress maintains an overview of pastoral care within the school through her communication with staff and pupils. Briefings and staff meetings are used to discuss any pupil concerns and where necessary issues are recorded in pupils' files.
- 3.5 Staff have high expectations of pupils at all times. This helps to promote good discipline and behaviour. The school has written policies and procedures to deal with bullying. Any incidents of inappropriate behaviour are recorded in a centrally held incidents file, although boarding records are not recorded in a way that is easy to monitor. Comments from the pupil questionnaire indicated that some pupils thought boarding sanctions were considered too strict, and at times, unfair. However, in discussion with pupils they understand the need for rules and mostly accept them as fair. Some classes develop their own codes of conduct so that everyone is able to get on with their learning.
- 3.6 The school has written policies for child protection and health and safety. However, these policies are not applied rigorously or consistently. Consequently there are a number of issues which cause significant concern and which could compromise the safety and protection of the pupils. The school is now aware of these and is taking steps to resolve them. The headmistress and head of care are the designated child protection officers and have received appropriate inter-agency training in child protection. The headmistress has also undertaken a

safe recruitment course. However, not all staff have received the required updates in training on child protection procedures.

- 3.7 Appropriate policies outlining the procedures to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards are in place, but have not been implemented consistently. The fire service has been appropriately involved, to make assessments and give advice. Fire extinguishers and electrical appliances checks are up to date and the school has a written detailed assessment of risk from fire. However, there are some significant shortfalls with the school's fire safety provision. Records indicate that fire drills do not take place with sufficient regularity. As the school has identified in its risk assessment, not all fire doors open in the correct way and two are locked. Fire alarms are not clearly audible in some rooms and smoke alarms are not regularly checked. Risk assessments are carried out for all off-site visits. Checks are made on the building and grounds for hazards and a maintenance system is in place. One or two additional health and safety issues were brought to the attention of the school.
- 3.8 Some aspects of first aid provision are supported by written policies and procedures. Appropriate accident and incident books are in place and accidents are recorded correctly. Records are kept for receiving, administering and recording both prescribed and non-prescribed medication, but there is no policy for the administering of medication. Whilst most staff have received basic first aid training, staff with training at the higher level are not always on duty during the latter part of the evenings and at weekends. A written accessibility plan is in place as required by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. The school maintains proper registers of admissions and attendance.
- 3.9 A hot meal is provided at lunchtime. Although salad is always available, other healthy options are limited. Pupils said that, although on the whole they enjoyed the food, they would like more choice. Some older boarders commented that sometimes they felt hungry. A healthy lifestyle is encouraged through regular outside play and sports activities.
- 3.10 The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) ensure appropriate training is provided for all staff on child protection [Regulation 3.(2)(b)];
  - (b) have regard to the boarding requirements for welfare, health and safety as reported by Ofsted [Regulation 3.(3)];
  - (c) give immediate attention to the health and safety issues raised and the school's fire safety provision [Regulations 3.(4) and 3.(5)].

## **The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community**

- 3.11 The links with parents and the wider community that the school has established are effective and worthwhile. They make a valuable contribution to the pupils' personal development and to the fulfilment of the school aims. Parents are supportive of the school and their response to the pre-inspection parent questionnaire was extremely positive. They are particularly happy with the progress of their children, the teaching, the quality of provision for boarders, as well as the way worthwhile attitudes and values are promoted. The main area of concern was related to how well parents are involved in the life of the school. Inspection findings show that parents receive appropriate opportunities for involvement. The school has maintained its good quality of links with parents highlighted in the last inspection and has made significant advances in establishing links with the wider community.
- 3.12 A sufficient range of helpful information is provided and this keeps parents well informed. It includes an informative prospectus, regular newsletters and an accessible website. The general and boarding handbooks are clear and parents find them helpful. The five consultation evenings, three full reports and three interim reports each year ensure parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and personal development. The reports are of good quality overall. Most, but not all, provide enough specific information about progress made and target areas for improvement.
- 3.13 Appropriate and worthwhile opportunities are given to parents to be involved in activities in the school, and the work and progress of their children. The school does not have a parent association but two parent representatives, one for day pupils and one for boarding, who communicate with parents to provide them with useful information about the school and to organise social events. All parents are encouraged to attend church services and events such as school productions, concerts, and prize day. They particularly appreciate the opportunity to attend workshops on a range of issues relating to the specific needs of their children. The school has worked hard to promote positive links with the wider community both locally and further afield. The school has close contacts with the local church, children play in matches with other schools and many village events are attended by the school.
- 3.14 The concerns of parents are handled appropriately. Records are kept, but are not held centrally, so that any trends or patterns of concerns can be readily identified, monitored and reviewed. Parents appreciate the ready availability of staff and their willingness to listen. A written complaints procedure is available, known to parents and this enables them to make a complaint on an informal or formal basis.
- 3.15 The school meets most of the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) have regard to the boarding requirements for the manner in which complaints are handled as reported by Ofsted [Regulation 7.(1)].

## **The Quality of Boarding Education**

- 3.16 Boarding is effective in contributing to the quality of education and personal development of the pupils. It provides a homely, supportive environment where pupils feel happy and cared for, and where good relationships are developed. It contributes well to developing pupils' confidence and independence in line with the school's aims. Over the last few years sound investment has been made in the refurbishment of the boarding facilities. However, as the school is aware, some aspects of the accommodation are not totally suitable and the number of activities are not sufficient for the boarders in the evenings and at weekends. Some significant aspects relating to staff recruitment and welfare, health and safety highlighted elsewhere in the report are unsatisfactory.
- 3.17 Relationships among pupils and the way they relate to the boarding staff are positive. Although each boarding house has its own rules appropriate for the age of the pupils, a common sense of purpose is evident. Pupils often arrive at the school with low self-esteem. In a calm, friendly and open atmosphere, boarders begin to feel relaxed, and are able to build up trusting relationships with house staff. They enjoy plenty of conversation with each other, informal and friendly contact with adults, and feel well supported. Pupils are helped to settle in quickly, and gradually their confidence begins to grow. Parents spoke of happy children who became more settled after joining the school. They also mentioned that they noticed a marked improvement in attitudes to work and progress. Dedicated hard-working house staff lead by example and boarders said they feel respected and cared for. Many state that friendships are considerably enhanced by the boarding experience. One young boarder commented that boarding was like "one big sleepover".
- 3.18 House staff create a welcoming environment for boarders who enjoy a range of activities in the evenings and at weekends. In the summer months they especially enjoy the freedom of the outside facilities when they can play on their bicycles or on go-karts. In the winter months the programme of activities is more limited. Film night is an eagerly anticipated part of the week. Efforts have been made to put on a fuller programme of weekend activities to fill the weekend for the relatively small number of full boarders and they are taken out to local village events, sports activities and the cinema. However, the lack of activities for the evening and weekends was commented on unfavourably by some of the older boarders.
- 3.19 Bedrooms vary in size but are uniformly comfortable, homely and well decorated, although boarders commented that one was very cold. Boarders are able to personalise their own space with posters and have suitable storage areas. In the main boarding house the layout of the main common room provides for informal contact between staff and pupils, and in the evening boarders gather for games and television. Whilst this provides a suitable space for leisure activities the accommodation does not provide a dedicated quiet seating area as provided for the boarders in the girls' boarding house. Other issues concerning the accommodation do not meet boarding requirements as reported by Ofsted. A rolling programme of refurbishment is in place.

## **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 Sound governance supports the school in securing an effective education for the pupils. The proprietors are fully aware of the school's educational strengths, as reflected in its ethos and the pupils' positive attitudes and strong relationships. Their knowledge and understanding of some significant aspects of pupils' welfare is insecure, however, and their governance in this area is unsatisfactory.
- 4.2 In terms of its structure and functions, the proprietors are providing sound oversight of the business management of the school. This results in appropriate educational provision and investment in human and material resources. The oversight relating to the welfare and pastoral structures and procedures is insufficient. There is a lack of long-term, structured, forward planning and a lack of sufficiently detailed monitoring of all aspects of school life. Although the formal review of child protection and health and safety policies has recently been undertaken, the present systems do not enable the proprietors to carry out their statutory responsibilities in these areas.
- 4.3 At the time of the last inspection an advisory committee known as the school council acted as a consultative body to the proprietors. Recently changes have taken place in the structure and duties of this body, and it is not yet sufficiently clear how it will support the proprietors in monitoring the quality of the school's provision. The proprietors are taking steps to meet this challenge by improving and developing the structure of the new governing body so that areas of support are made more explicit.
- 4.4 The headmistress is responsible for advising the proprietors on all curricular, regulatory and school development. The proprietors take an active interest in the school and communicate regularly with the headmistress and other members of staff through weekly meetings, email and by telephone.

### **The Quality of Leadership and Management**

- 4.5 The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall, and have been effective in a number of important areas of the school's provision: the quality of the teaching, pupils' attitudes to their learning, their good personal development and the considerable knowledge the staff have of their pupils. It has remained true to its aims, most notably in giving pupils the independence and confidence to succeed and to enable them to proceed to their next stage of education with assurance. This is because of the thoughtful support given to each and every pupil and the development of many areas of the curriculum to provide a good quality of education overall.
- 4.6 Other aspects of the school's leadership and management have some shortcomings which have not been addressed. Insufficient rigour has been applied to ensuring documented policies and procedures are implemented, monitored and complied with effectively, particularly with regard to safeguarding, welfare, health and safety.
- 4.7 Many changes have taken place since the last inspection: the appointment of a new headmistress, the restructuring of the senior management team with new personnel and responsibilities, several new members of staff and the review of management systems to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The school is aware that these changes have not been sufficiently reviewed and consolidated.

- 4.8 The leadership of the school has focused on maintaining a good quality of education for the pupils and ensuring that they are able to gain admission to schools appropriate to their aptitudes and abilities. In this it has been successful. The headmistress has been delegated the responsibility for academic, social and regulatory aspects of the school and liaises with senior staff members where appropriate. However, within the senior management team difficulties are sometimes experienced in resolving conflicts of opinion, and clear lines of communication have not been adequately established. Consequently the structure of management does not ensure effectiveness in all areas of school life. The school is aware that its systems of communication are not strong enough.
- 4.9 Newly written and reviewed policies cover most aspects of school life. However their effectiveness is weakened because no robust system exists to ensure that their implementation is consistently and rigorously monitored. There are gaps in the detail of compliance within the carrying out of these policies. Conversely, successful progress has been made since the last inspection in the development of the curriculum and to ensure that the needs of all pupils are incorporated into subject policies and schemes of work.
- 4.10 Through a process of self evaluation the headmistress and senior management team have identified the school's strengths together with areas requiring improvement. A school development plan is being formulated but it is not yet sufficiently rigorous to guide the strategic development of the school in the longer term. It does not identify priorities within timescales or their budgetary implications.
- 4.11 Staff are highly committed and hard working. They ensure good support is given to the pupils and they make a significant contribution to their achievements and well-being. Teacher to pupil ratio is high due to the nature of the small group and individual work provided for these pupils. The school's procedures are appropriate in some respects for ensuring that suitable staff are appointed to the various roles within the school and recorded on one central register. However, records indicate that not all legally required checks have been completed whilst others have only just been undertaken. The school is aware of these failings and is taking steps to resolve them. The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and staff new to the profession are properly supported. Courses and in-service training opportunities are available for staff, although a central record is not in place of the training undertaken by staff, so that its contribution to school development can be regularly monitored. A formal appraisal system is being developed throughout the school.
- 4.12 Sufficient resources have been made available to meet the needs of the pupils. The school has refurbished and enhanced the library. ICT and science facilities and resources have improved, which extend the pupils' learning experiences in these subjects. Opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in a variety of team and individual sports but, as identified at the time of the last inspection, there is little provision for indoor PE. The development of a car park has been welcomed by the parents and local community alike. The premises are adequately maintained overall. Although best use is made of the available space in the main school building, accommodation is limited in some areas such as the dining room which is small for the numbers of pupils, and no dedicated relaxation area is available for the boarders. The school has a medical room where pupils can lie down when they are unwell but, although it contains a wash basin, it is not close to a toilet.
- 4.13 Administrative and other support staff provide good quality assistance to staff, pupils and visitors. Non-teaching and support staff make an important contribution to the well-being of the pupils and the fulfilment of the schools' aims.

- 4.14 The school meets most of the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff [Standard 4]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) ensure that appropriate recruitment checks are carried out on all staff before their appointment [Regulations 4.(2)(a),(b) and (e)];
  - (b) for each appointment, enter on the central register the date of completion of all required recruitment checks [Regulations 4C.(2)(b) to (d) and (g), and 4C.(3)].
- 4.15 The school meets most of the regulatory requirements for premises and accommodation [Standard 5]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) ensure that appropriate facilities are available for pupils who are ill [Regulation 5.(1)];
  - (b) have regard to the boarding requirements for premises and accommodation as reported by Ofsted [Regulation 5.(u)].
- 4.16 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

### **Overall Conclusions**

- 5.1 The school is successful in achieving its aims and aspirations and the needs of all its pupils in many respects. Dedicated staff ensure a good quality of education. Pupils' behaviour, attitudes to learning and personal development are all good. Pupils do not see their difficulties as a barrier and often show exceptional perseverance and commitment achieving good standards in their work and activities. Such achievement is predominantly due to the effective teaching and the individual support and encouragement devoted to each pupil. For the size of the school pupils are provided with a wide range of enjoyable and stimulating extra curricular activities which contributes well to their personal development. Recreational activities for boarders, however, are limited. The school is aware that its strategies for monitoring policies and procedures or ensuring compliance with statutory requirements, particularly those relating to pupils' welfare, health and safety are ineffective. This results in inconsistencies in practice not being identified and resolved. Planning in the longer term does not have the necessary rigour to ensure consistency and effectiveness of provision in all aspects of school life. Pupils make a good contribution to the life of the school through the strong relationships they have with each other and the staff. By the time they leave the school, they are happy, confident young people, who have been well-prepared for the next stage of their education.
- 5.2 The school has responded well to the recommendations outlined in the previous inspection and made improvement in most of the areas identified. In particular, the school has developed the curriculum, in subjects such as science, DT and ICT, with improved teaching, accommodation and resources, although the provision for physical education is still limited in some areas. The library has been moved and refurbished to make it more homely and conducive for quiet reading and private study.
- 5.3 The school complies with most of the regulatory requirements, but does not at present meet Standard 3 (welfare, health and safety), Standard 4 (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors), Standard 5 (premises and accommodation) and Standard 7 (the manner in which complaints are to be handled).

## Next Steps

- 5.4 In order to improve further, the school should take the following steps.
1. Ensure an effective framework is in place to support and strengthen leadership and management by:
    - developing the newly formed governing body, to provide stronger oversight of all aspects of the life and work of the school, and in particular for welfare, health and safety;
    - providing clearer management functions to ensure that systems are implemented consistently and rigorously throughout the school;
    - developing longer-term strategic planning consistent with the school's aims and values which covers all areas of school life.
  2. Provide a greater range of opportunities to improve the breadth of work in physical education.
  3. Review the activities programme and recreational facilities for the boarders.
- 5.5 In order to meet all the regulatory requirements, the school must:
- (1) ensure appropriate training is provided for all staff on child protection [Regulation 3.(2)(b)];
  - (2) have regard to the boarding requirements for welfare, health and safety as reported by Ofsted [Regulation 3.(3)];
  - (3) give immediate attention to the health and safety issues raised and the school's fire safety provision [Regulations 3.(4) and 3.(5)];
  - (4) have regard to the boarding requirements for the manner in which complaints are handled as reported by Ofsted [Regulation 7.(1)];
  - (5) ensure that appropriate recruitment checks are carried out on all staff before their appointment [Regulations 4.(2)(a),(b) and (e)];
  - (6) for each appointment, enter on the central register the date of completion of all required recruitment checks [Regulations 4C.(2)(b) to (d) and (g), and 4C.(3)];
  - (7) ensure that appropriate facilities are available for pupils who are ill [Regulation 5.(1)];
  - (8) have regard to the boarding requirements for premises and accommodation as reported by Ofsted [Regulation 5.(u)].

## **6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> 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 the proprietor, 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 medical room. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.
- 6.2 National Minimum Boarding Standards were inspected by a team of two Ofsted inspectors over four days.

### **List of Inspectors**

Mrs Gail Purt	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Susan Nebesnuick	Former Director of Studies, SHMIS school
Mr Adrian Lowe-Wheeler	Deputy Head, IAPS school