



**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**WITHINGTON GIRLS' SCHOOL**

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Withington Girls' School

Full Name of School	<b>Withington Girls' School</b>
DfE Number	<b>352/6033</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>526632</b>
Address	<b>Withington Girls' School Wellington Road Fallowfield Manchester M14 6BL</b>
Telephone Number	<b>0161 224 1077</b>
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Email Address	<b>head@withington.manchester.sch.uk</b>
Headmistress	<b>Mrs Sue Marks</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Mrs Elisabeth Lee</b>
Age Range	<b>7 to 18</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>634</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Girls</b>
Numbers by Age	7-11: <b>94</b> 11-18: <b>540</b>
Inspection dates	<b>24 Sep 2013 to 27 Sep 2013</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in October 2007.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed on the website [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). Additionally, inspections will consider the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where Achievement is 'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade.** Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. **For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.**

## INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Withington Girls' School is a selective independent school for girls aged seven to eighteen, which was founded in 1890 and is situated in the Fallowfield area of Manchester. There are 94 pupils in the junior school and 540 in the senior school, of whom 153 are in the sixth form. Most members of the governing body have a prior association with the school.
- 1.2 The school's aims include: creating a caring and supportive environment in which every member of the school community is well known and well supported, and individual needs are met; ensuring the highest quality of teaching and learning across a broad curriculum to help girls attain an excellent standard of academic achievement; developing an intellectual curiosity, a love of learning, independence of mind and individual responsibility; encouraging respect for self and others; developing strong links with parents, alumnae and the local community.
- 1.3 Pupils come from families living in Manchester and surrounding towns and villages, up to a distance of about 30 miles. Just over two-fifths of pupils come from backgrounds other than white British. A trust fund allows the school to recruit pupils from less advantaged backgrounds through means-tested bursaries, and currently around one in six pupils in the senior school receive financial support.
- 1.4 The ability profile of the junior school is above the national average, with over a third of pupils having ability that is well above average; few pupils are of less than above average ability. The ability profile of the senior school is well above the national average, with three-quarters of pupils having well above average ability, and all pupils being of at least above average ability. The ability profile of the sixth form is above the national average, with a quarter of pupils having well above average ability. Admission to the school is by entrance examinations, reports and interviews. Junior school pupils come from a variety of schools in the maintained and independent sectors. Nearly all pupils in the junior school are successful in the examinations and interviews for the senior school, and they constitute about a third of the intake into Year 7. The remainder come in equal measure from both maintained and independent primary schools. The great majority of pupils stay on into the sixth form and are joined by several pupils from other schools, who have met the necessary entry requirements.
- 1.5 The school has 152 pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL); the great majority are fully bilingual and 6 receive extra support. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Twenty-one pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- 1.6 Since the previous inspection, a new headmistress has been appointed. A sixth-form common room and six new classrooms have been built. Investment has also been made in other areas, including in information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.

- 1.7 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum equivalence are shown in the following tables.

***Junior School***

School	NC name
Transition	Year 3
Form I	Year 4
Lower II	Year 5
Upper II	Year 6

***Senior School***

School	NC name
Third Form	Year 7
Lower Fourth	Year 8
Upper Fourth	Year 9
Lower Fifth	Year 10
Upper Fifth	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13

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

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

- 2.1 The school is highly successful in both meeting its aims and in fulfilling the wishes of its founders; amongst these is to create a caring and supportive environment for each individual and to help girls to achieve excellence both academically and in other spheres. The results of public examinations, and the evidence gained from inspection, demonstrate that the pupils achieve at the highest levels and make excellent progress throughout the school, including within the junior school and the sixth form. The curriculum which underpins pupils' learning is broad and carefully constructed, and offers choice at all stages. Much care is taken over planning the continuity of the curriculum between junior and senior schools. The curriculum fully meets the needs of academically able pupils and is supported by an excellent range and quality of extra-curricular activities.
- 2.2 Pupils demonstrate outstanding learning qualities. They are receptive, alert, articulate and highly motivated. They demonstrate excellent learning skills and synthesise arguments easily. Their creativity is evident within music, art and drama. Pupils use ICT confidently and have highly developed research skills. The quality of teaching is excellent and is characterised by a genuine passion for the subject and great enthusiasm within the classroom. The school is seeking to develop more independent thinking skills within pupils but some teaching currently inhibits the taking of initiative and does not fully extend them. In response to the recommendations of the previous inspection there has been an improvement in the quality of assessment practice, with greater evidence of formative advice to pupils.
- 2.3 Pupils' personal development is excellent and a distinctive feature throughout both the junior and senior schools. They are confident, happy and self-reflective, with genuine concern and respect for both their peers and staff. They are socially aware and the diverse nature of the community promotes their deep-rooted understanding of other cultures. The quality of care provided by the school is excellent and the standard of pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Relationships are based on mutual respect and trust, and the school operates as a harmonious and happy community with the minimum of rules. Healthy living is actively promoted and the school routinely seeks the views of pupils, for example through the school council.
- 2.4 Governance is excellent, representing an improvement since the previous inspection. Governors are highly committed and have an extensive range of professional skills, which they utilise to the benefit of the school. Governors maintain a clear, strategic role in shaping the development of the school and have appropriate systems in place to monitor and support its provision and ensure the safeguarding of pupils. Leadership and management are also excellent, and have improved since the previous inspection. Strong and dedicated senior leadership is supported by highly effective middle management. Departmental development plans now reflect more closely the priorities of the school development plan.



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

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

2.5 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

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

2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

1. Ensure consistency in the quality of teaching throughout the school so that all matches the excellent standard of the majority.

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

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

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning is exceptional.
- 3.2 Pupils receive an outstanding education in accordance with the school's aims to help girls achieve an excellent standard of academic achievement, and to foster an intellectual curiosity, a love of learning, independence of mind and individual responsibility.
- 3.3 In the junior school, pupils study with dedication and produce high quality and often imaginative work. They demonstrate higher order thinking skills, express themselves clearly and use a very wide vocabulary. They are also able to transfer skills successfully across subject boundaries.
- 3.4 Pupils throughout show high levels of knowledge and understanding. They are mature and frequently demonstrate initiative, for example in taking notes. They are highly articulate and are often bold, independent thinkers who relish discussing their ideas. They have well-developed skills of research and can write confidently and persuasively. Pupils' ability to be creative and original is seen in striking artwork and in a variety of formats of written work that is exceptionally well organised and neatly presented.
- 3.5 Pupils are enthusiastic learners and show a great sense of enjoyment in meeting intellectual, physical and creative challenges, such as the chemistry Olympiad. They are focused in lessons and listen attentively, asking perceptive and thought-provoking questions as well as forming coherent arguments. They work well both individually and in collaboration with each other, either in pairs or in larger groups. This is evident from the youngest age. Pupils' mathematical skills are excellent and, together with logical thinking, they apply these effectively across the curriculum, for example in a Year 12 chemistry lesson where they deduced and calculated empirical and molecular formulas.
- 3.6 The most able achieve their potential through activities and strategies devised to stretch them intellectually. Pupils with SEND and those with EAL are well integrated into classes and they make excellent progress, in line with their peers. Results in standardised tests of attainment indicate that junior school pupils achieve higher than national norms in English and mathematics. The junior school does not enter pupils for national tests, but based on inspection evidence from standardised measures of progress, lesson observation and scrutiny of pupils' work, progress is judged to be excellent. In the senior school, analysis of attainment at GCSE for the years 2010 to 2012 shows that performance has been exceptional in relation to the national average for girls in maintained schools, and above the national average for girls in maintained selective schools. Results in all International GCSE (IGCSE) subjects have been higher than worldwide and UK averages. A-level performance has also been exceptional in relation to the national average for girls in maintained schools, and well above the national average for girls in maintained selective schools. The levels of attainment at GCSE and A level, and standardised measures of progress, indicate that pupils make progress that is high in relation to the average for pupils of similar ability. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.
- 3.7 Pupils also achieve at an exceptionally high level in activities. They gain recognition in debating and essay competitions at national level, and in the Model United

Nations and the Global Business Challenge. There have also been notable successes in mathematics, science and linguistic Olympiads, including winning gold medals in the British Physics Olympiad. Some pupils play in the Halle Youth Orchestra, and significant numbers achieve the gold standard of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE). In sport, pupils show exceptionally high levels of physical skill across a wide range of activities and teams enjoy local and regional success in netball, hockey and lacrosse, where a number have become junior international players.

- 3.8 Pupils are highly successful in gaining entry to their higher education institution of choice, including highly competitive universities and art colleges.

### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision**

- 3.9 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.10 The curriculum is broad and well matched to the age and ability range of the pupils, and provides highly effective coverage of all areas of learning. It fulfils the school's aim of helping pupils to reach an excellent standard of academic achievement.
- 3.11 In the junior school key elements of the curriculum in Years 5 and 6 are planned and taught by subject specialists from the senior school, providing continuity of learning across the two schools. Pupils are taught Latin, French, Spanish and German for one year each in the junior school, allowing them to make an informed choice of two modern foreign languages in Year 7. Junior school pupils also benefit from a weekly thinking and learning lesson.
- 3.12 In the senior school, setting by ability takes place in English in Year 10, in mathematics between Years 8 and 11 and in sciences in Years 10 and 11, enabling progress at an appropriate pace for the individual. The personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) scheme is well resourced, carefully designed and highly regarded by the pupils.
- 3.13 To provide additional challenge for pupils, opportunities are now provided in English, mathematics, sciences and French to lead to the IGCSE qualification. All pupils are prepared for an ICT qualification at the end of Year 11. The Year 11 timetable also includes critical thinking and study skills.
- 3.14 The option blocks at GCSE and A level are constructed according to the pupils' initial selections, allowing almost all choices to be accommodated. A significant proportion of pupils take four subjects to A level, drawn from the total of twenty-three available, as well as general studies, which is studied by all pupils. The Extended Project Qualification and Open University courses provide additional challenge and opportunity for independent research and make a strong contribution to the academic and personal development of sixth-form pupils.
- 3.15 The provision of careers education and guidance has been substantially strengthened since the previous inspection through greatly enhanced facilities, increased allocation of time for the head of careers and the introduction of a careers fair. Opportunities for team sports have been strengthened through the employment of numerous additional peripatetic specialist sports coaches and through installation of floodlights for the all-weather pitches. The creation of a fitness suite has provided a valuable facility for individual exercise, and the refurbished gymnasium is also used as a dance studio.

- 3.16 Information and communication technology provision has also improved. A Virtual Learning Environment has been implemented and was observed successfully supporting independent learning in several lessons.
- 3.17 Extra-curricular provision is excellent and it provides extensive opportunities in music, drama, art and sport. Musical groups flourish and the senior orchestra was seen to perform at a high standard. Dramatic productions are sometimes held in combination with other schools, and team and individual sports provide opportunity for serious competition, as well as for those who wish to take part in a more leisurely way. Large numbers of pupils take part in the DofE and in a wealth of clubs and societies, including an astronomy club, 'little critters' (pets) club, Eco Warriors and Amnesty International. Pupils of all ages speak very positively about this provision.
- 3.18 Links with the community are strong, with pupils raising money for a wide array of local, national and international charities through events such as cake sales and an annual fashion show. Sixth-form pupils undertake a voluntary service programme and provide help in residential homes and community centres, and through a science club for local primary-aged pupils. The school also makes available its facilities to the local community. Pupils in the sixth form are involved in various international links that the school has with Kenya, Uganda and The Gambia.

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

- 3.19 The contribution of teaching is excellent.
- 3.20 Teaching fully supports the aims of the school for pupils to become mature, independent learners in an environment that is challenging and supportive. It is highly effective in enabling pupils to develop their skills and further their knowledge and understanding. Parents and pupils highly praise the quality of teaching. The majority is lively and challenging, and teachers create an atmosphere in which the pupils can enjoy learning for its own sake. A junior school pupil delighted in the fact that she 'learned something new every day'. Scholarship is celebrated; questions are encouraged and pupils are comfortable to ask them.
- 3.21 In the senior school, teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and questioning skills, probing for deeper knowledge and understanding, and encouraging pupils to think, analyse and draw conclusions. In the junior school, teaching demonstrates imagination and creativity, further enthusing the pupils and developing a strong context for their learning.
- 3.22 Teaching demonstrates awareness of pupils' capabilities, and is adapted accordingly to meet their differing needs. Provision for pupils with SEND is mostly excellent and well monitored. Teaching also caters for the most able, with appropriate extension tasks and strategies included in the planning of lessons. For example, in mathematics pupils are given challenging 'golden questions' to solve.
- 3.23 Teaching fosters a sense of pride in personal achievement and an outstanding work ethic. Well-paced and stimulating teaching is successful in producing an enthusiastic response. Pupils thrive on opportunities to think for themselves and engage in discussion, where they display particular confidence and poise. Teachers build skilfully on the pupils' exemplary behaviour and harness their enthusiasm and willingness, to promote rapid progress. They set very high expectations. The best teaching is characterised by a light touch that guides and facilitates the pupils' learning. On a small number of occasions in both sections of the school, teaching

relies more heavily on closed activities, which underestimates the pupils' potential , thus slowing their progress.

- 3.24 Planning is extremely effective in helping pupils to make rapid progress. Teachers use a range of approaches and activities to enhance learning and ensure that pupils are engaged and excited. Resources are imaginative and varied, and many teachers take advantage of new technologies to make lessons more accessible and lively. They manage time well, so that the pace of work is commensurate with the ability of the pupils.
- 3.25 The excellent standard of the best teaching is not yet fully consistent throughout, with pockets of less effective teaching in some cases. The school has plans to address this through sharing best practice within and between departments.
- 3.26 Most work is marked frequently, accurately and thoroughly. In some cases, marking lacks detailed commentary and creates some confusion for pupils over the way in which pupils' work is graded. Most teachers go to great lengths to offer constructive advice for improvement, setting targets for development that are attainable but challenging: for example in the junior school within English and mathematics. In interviews, a number of pupils acknowledged the significant contribution that target setting makes to their progress.
- 3.27 Teachers show passion for their subjects and clearly enjoy sharing their interest and knowledge with the pupils. Their enthusiasm engenders interest and endeavour. They are always prepared to help if difficulties arise outside the classroom, and pupils speak with warmth and gratitude of their dedication and willingness to 'go the extra mile'. This promotes excellent relationships in the classroom, and thus a highly positive atmosphere that is conducive to learning and enjoyment.

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

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

- 4.1 The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- 4.2 The school fulfils its aim of helping pupils to achieve success in a relaxed atmosphere of respect for self and others, without the need for excessive rules and regulations. It places clear value on individuality and celebrates diversity, whilst emphasising tolerance, teamwork and responsibility. Pupils achieve an exceptionally high level of personal development and show great emotional maturity. They are modest, yet confident and articulate.
- 4.3 Its spiritual dimension is a key strength of the school and pupils show clear appreciation of non-material aspects of life. Since the previous inspection, and in response to requests from pupils and parents, a combination of secular, single- and multi-faith assemblies has been introduced, which successfully celebrate the spiritual diversity of the school's population. These allow pupils to explore their own faith whilst setting it in context with others. The resulting open-mindedness and mutual respect underpin the spiritual life of the school. Music and drama also contribute significantly to the pupils' spiritual development. The orchestra's accomplished rendition of Copland's *Hoe Down* and an outstanding devised drama piece performed by a group in Year 13 exemplified pupils' highly developed emotional intelligence.
- 4.4 Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of right and wrong. Their behaviour in the classroom and around school is impeccable, requiring minimal adult intervention. The school exudes an atmosphere of order, calm and purpose. Pupils display outstanding manners and courtesy, both amongst themselves and towards staff and visitors. The extensive PSHCE programme, taught throughout Years 3 to 11, successfully underpins the pupils' moral and social education; a girl in Year 5 felt that the subject helps to make her a better person. In the sixth form, a number of opportunities allow pupils to explore moral issues and dilemmas.
- 4.5 The pupils' social development is outstanding. They are caring, thoughtful and kind to one another and clearly enjoy each other's company. There are many opportunities in school and beyond for pupils to develop social responsibility and leadership skills; peer support, the school council and the catering committee are some of many ways in which the pupils become actively involved. The wide-ranging voluntary service scheme in which sixth-form pupils participate involves working in a variety of settings, such as local primary schools, community centres, care homes, centres for people with disabilities and charity shops. They accompany younger pupils on residential trips. Pupils show great empathy for those less fortunate than themselves, illustrated by the many charitable initiatives undertaken throughout the year.
- 4.6 Pupils' awareness of other cultures is strong. As well as the extensive faith-based assemblies, there are many opportunities afforded by the curriculum and by foreign trips and exchanges for pupils to explore cultures different from their own. External speakers also enrich the pupils' experience; for example, a Jewish parent visited the junior school to discuss the festivals celebrated by her faith. A long-standing connection with a primary school in The Gambia is another example of the way in which the school promotes cultural awareness.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care**

- 4.7 The contribution of the arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.8 Very successful implementation of a well-planned policy provides high quality support and guidance for pupils, fully in accordance with the school's aims. Extremely effective lines of communication and co-operation exist amongst all staff with responsibility for pastoral matters. Provision has recently been strengthened by the appointment of an additional part-time nurse and a part-time counsellor.
- 4.9 The small size of the junior school, and the support given by form teachers, ensure that pupils feel valued. New entrants are monitored closely and very effective advice aids transition between key stages. Pupils say that they feel both happy and safe at school and that their voice is heard. Effective measures are in place to seek the views of pupils, including a school council and a catering committee.
- 4.10 Warmth and approachability characterise the outstanding relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils say that there is always a member of staff available to help with any concern. Relationships are similarly positive amongst the pupils themselves, with older girls doing much to help the younger ones, especially as 'peer supporters'.
- 4.11 The school guards very effectively against bullying. New anti-bullying statements and posters have been produced through the school council, and pupils say that instances of bullying are extremely rare.
- 4.12 Pupils are encouraged to develop healthy eating habits. In pre-inspection questionnaire responses, a small minority of pupils expressed concern over the quality of lunches. During interviews, however, pupils of all ages said the lunch menus were 'really good', with plenty of choice. Inspectors judged the quality and choice of food to be excellent. The extensive programme of games and physical education ensures that pupils take regular and varied exercise.
- 4.13 The school has a suitable plan to improve educational access for pupils with SEND, and goes to great lengths to support pupils with additional needs.
- 4.14 Effective reward procedures, including house points, acknowledge special effort and achievement. Sanctions are rarely used and are imposed according to a clear procedure. Pupils feel that both rewards and sanctions are awarded fairly.

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

- 4.15 The contribution of the arrangements for welfare, health and safety is excellent.
- 4.16 Since the previous inspection, the school has continued to review its policies and refine its procedures, making good use of external expertise where appropriate, for example in conducting an annual audit of provision.
- 4.17 The school has a comprehensive health and safety policy and all necessary measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. Staff are trained in the use of fire equipment, regular fire drills are held and weekly fire alarm tests take place. The system for recording these has been modified recently to enable closer and easier monitoring by senior staff.
- 4.18 Appropriate risk assessments are carried out and recorded for both internal and external school activities, including day trips and residential visits. Risk assessments of all rooms in the school are completed on a termly basis. A health and safety committee, with representation from a wide spectrum of staff and a school governor, meets termly and considers reports from different sections within the school. Health and safety matters are then presented for the consideration of all governors, incorporating, for example, proposals for changes to accessibility arrangements. Induction training for new staff includes health and safety.
- 4.19 Medical care, provided by the school nurses and trained first aiders, is excellent, and their work is greatly valued. Facilities for pupils who are unwell or injured are provided in a welcoming medical centre located conveniently for both the junior and senior schools. The policy for first aid is effective and the recording of accidents is meticulous.
- 4.20 Appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place and safer recruitment procedures are implemented rigorously. The school arranges suitable staff training in safeguarding. Staff provide the highest levels of care for pupils, and pupils know whom to contact in case of concerns.
- 4.21 Attendance and admission registers are suitably maintained, backed up daily and correctly stored.



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

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

- 5.1 The quality of governance is excellent.
- 5.2 Governance strongly supports the aims and ethos of the school. All members of the governing body are highly committed to the school. They come from a range of professional backgrounds, and their shared expertise in health and safety, architecture, education, law and finance contributes on a regular basis to the development of the school. Most governors have a previous connection with the school, either as former pupils or as parents of former pupils, and together with governors elected by the parents' association or by the alumnae body, they help to strengthen further the links between the governing body and the school.
- 5.3 The effective finance and general purposes committee ensures that detailed financial planning takes place, and that the school's needs are fully met. A carefully managed bursary fund allows the school to provide financial support for pupils from less advantaged backgrounds. All academic and other matters are considered by the whole governing body, which meets termly and hears regular presentations by school staff to remain abreast of academic and other developments. In addition, individual governors are linked with departments within the school, a process which is much valued by staff. There is excellent communication between the governing body and staff in both the junior and the senior schools.
- 5.4 Governors have a keen insight into the working of the school and contribute highly effectively to its strategic development. An annual strategy day allows governors to both plan for the future and to conduct a thorough review of regulatory matters. Governors exercise a very thorough role in monitoring the work and educational standards of the school, and the mechanisms in place for this have been strengthened since the previous inspection. Governors are fully involved in the construction and evaluation of the school's development plan.
- 5.5 Governors are highly effective in discharging their responsibilities for welfare, health and safety, and in addition to receiving the regular reports from the health and safety committee, they monitor policy. They also undertake a very thorough and annual review of the safeguarding policy and procedures, with a named governor taking the lead in this area.
- 5.6 An induction programme is in place for new governors and regular opportunities are available for further training.

**5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.7 The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians, is excellent.
- 5.8 Leadership at all levels is highly effective. It is focused on common goals and working towards a single purpose, to secure the highest possible standards of education for the pupils. The school has a clearly articulated development plan which, in response to a recommendation made at the previous inspection, is now clearly reflected in departmental development planning and is cross-referenced with the aims of the school. There is therefore much greater cohesion within the whole planning process. The senior leadership team provides strong educational direction and has successfully implemented a variety of initiatives that contribute to the exceptional achievements of the pupils, including peer observations and a comprehensive appraisal system for all staff. Currently, academic leaders are developing a formal, whole-school system for tracking pupils' progress.
- 5.9 The senior leadership team provides a strong vision for the school's continued improvement, underpinned by the implementation of robust policies and high expectations for all. Leadership within the junior school is motivational and inspirational, and helps to forge especially close links with parents.
- 5.10 Heads of department follow the clear educational direction set by the senior leadership team and lead staff effectively in promoting the pursuit of excellence in all curricular and extra-curricular areas. Management of the tutor teams sets clear guidelines, policies and procedures for the highly effective and outstanding care and support of the pupils. This cohesive and collaborative approach of all staff is evident in the excellent personal development of all pupils. The designated child protection officers have received formal training and close links have been established with local safeguarding agencies. The welfare, health and safety and the safeguarding needs of the pupils are well met and all staff receive necessary training. The training provision is carefully recorded and the quality is regularly evaluated.
- 5.11 School self-evaluation is thorough and all staff have the opportunity to contribute. This increases the shared ownership of the resulting development objectives. The staff, teaching and non-teaching, are highly qualified and committed to the school. New staff follow a comprehensive induction programme and are supported by a mentor. All staff feel well supported by the senior leadership team and a line management structure provides clearly delegated responsibilities. Staff have job descriptions and a biennial appraisal system is in place. The targets set define staff training needs. Budgeting for professional development ensures that both statutory requirements and the training objectives identified by the development plan are met.
- 5.12 The management of support staff is also highly effective. Arrangements for checking the suitability of staff, volunteers and governors to work with children are thorough and the single central register is effectively maintained.
- 5.13 The quality of links between the school and parents is excellent and strongly supports the school's aims. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire showed overwhelming support from parents, especially with the communications they receive from the school, the quality of the education the pupils receive, the level of pastoral support and the activities offered. No concerns were raised by a significant number of parents. The school has a clear complaints procedure that is effectively

implemented and parents know whom to contact if necessary. They are contented that their concerns are dealt with speedily and appropriately. Parents' views are actively sought by the school.

- 5.14 Communications with parents are detailed and frequent. Weekly reminders of forthcoming events are sent by email and a wealth of information can be accessed through the secure parent pages on the school's website. The termly *Bulletin* recounts highlights of the term. All printed material — the prospectus, welcome leaflets and booklets — are well produced, accessible and informative.
- 5.15 The frequency of reporting within the senior school has recently increased and parents now receive six progress reports each year and a formal report at the end of the year. A few parents commented unfavourably on the new style of reports. Inspection evidence did not support these concerns. A parents' evening is arranged for each year group at least once a year, and twice for Years 7 and 9, although parents are welcomed in to school at any time, should a need arise.
- 5.16 The relationship with parents is strong, and parents are highly supportive of the school and of its fund-raising campaigns. They welcome the formal and informal social occasions. The parents' association is very active and events are well supported, especially the spring fair and the ball. Parents are also involved in the life of the school, volunteering to help with mock university interviews, attending the careers fair and giving talks to pupils. Parents of pupils in the junior school attend the popular parents' breakfasts.

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