

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Belmont, Mill Hill Preparatory School

The senior school, Mill Hill School, and the pre-preparatory school, Grimsdell, were inspected at the same time and separate reports published.

Full Name of the School	Belmont, Mill Hill Preparatory School
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Registered Charity Number	1064758
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Chair of Governors	Sir Robert Balchin
Age Range	7 to 13
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	5th to 8th November 2007

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 and May 2007.

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 Belmont, Mill Hill Preparatory School, is a co-educational school for boys and girls aged between 7 and 13 years. It was created as the boys' preparatory school for Mill Hill School in 1912 until it became co-educational in 1995. It is based in an eighteenth-century house, with many purpose-built additional buildings, set in extensive grounds which include a woodland play area, in a residential area of north London.
- 1.2 It is part of the charitable Mill Hill Foundation which comprises Mill Hill (senior school), Belmont and Grimsdell (pre-preparatory school). The day-to-day educational arrangements for the schools are separate, but they share governors and a central administration.
- 1.3 The Foundation's aims are to provide excellence in education, supporting pupils from childhood towards adulthood within a Christian environment, while accepting those of other faiths and none. In addition, Belmont's specific aims are to inspire and motivate pupils in a safe and stimulating learning environment in which they can achieve their full potential through a broad curriculum and extensive extra-curricular activities, and become confident, independent and respectful young people.
- 1.4 Since the last inspection, the head was appointed in 2004. Support for pupils who are gifted and talented and those for whom English is not their first language has been introduced. The school has increased in size to 415 and the proportion of girls is two-fifths of the overall pupil population. This increases to nearly half in Years 7 and 8. Transfer from Grimsdell and to Mill Hill is now assured if the heads feel that this is appropriate. Facilities have been improved and pupils have access to a wider range of activities.
- 1.5 At the time of the inspection, 415 pupils were on roll (250 boys and 165 girls). Of these 255 were in Years 3 to 6 (163 boys and 92 girls) and 160 in Years 7 and 8 (87 boys and 73 girls). The majority of pupils transfer to Mill Hill School, but a number gain places to senior schools in both the independent and maintained sectors.
- 1.6 The main entry points are Year 3 and Year 7, though a number of pupils join at all stages as places become available. Pupils are assessed at Grimsdell before entry to Belmont and other pupils, entering the schools from outside the Foundation, have an interview and take assessments in English and mathematics. Preference is given to siblings and families with connections to the Foundation. The majority of pupils who enter the school in Year 7 come from maintained primary schools. Judged from standardised tests taken by the pupils in Years 3 to 8, their average ability is above the national average. If pupils perform in line with their ability, their results are likely to be above the national average for all maintained primary schools. Pupils take national tests at the age of 11.
- 1.7 Pupils come mainly from families who work in the business sector and some are involved in the professions. Many parents are new to the independent sector and have high expectations for their children's education. About one fifth of pupils come from families of ethnic minorities and a significant number of these are Jewish. Pupils within the school speak 27 different languages, though they are predominantly fluent in English. This diversity reflects the nature of the local community. Three pupils have statements of educational need. The school has identified two pupils who need support for their English and fifty-nine who have mild learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).
- 1.8 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 education provided is highly successful in reflecting the school's aims and philosophy. Through a broad, balanced curriculum and an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities, pupils achieve their full potential and become confident, independent and respectful young people. They have a wide range of stimulating educational experiences in which their linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human, social, physical, aesthetic and creative needs are well met. Parents expressed overwhelming support for the range of subjects on offer for their children. At the last inspection, the time allocated to design technology (DT) and information and communication technology (ICT) was rather short. A comprehensive timetable audit has resulted in longer lessons. This has contributed to a greater breadth and depth to the curriculum, with a better system to ensure that all subjects have sufficient time for teaching. Pupils commented: "we get more work done".
- 2.2 The complex system of streaming and setting pupils by ability works extremely well. It ensures that the curriculum is as accessible as possible for everyone. For example, pupils new to Year 7 who have not learnt Latin have the opportunity to do so, and they are given extra support after school so that they can reach the necessary standard for examination entry when they leave. Pupils acquire linguistic skills through their work in Latin and French. A strong emphasis is placed on the promotion of pupils' personal and physical development. An excellent personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme has been developed. Generous time is given to all kinds of physical activity, including weekly swimming for all ages. The school has an inclusive policy for sport so that pupils of all abilities have the chance to play in a team for the school. The extensive grounds, with plenty of variety in the areas for play and social mixing, allow pupils, whatever their age, to find somewhere to let off steam or to sit quietly and talk. Plenty of opportunities exist for the development of pupils' speaking skills. For example, pupils are involved in assemblies and the School Council. They also perform on their musical instruments in chapel and take part in plays and musical productions.
- 2.3 The extensive and varied programme of extra-curricular activities is excellent, and the quality is good. It makes an important contribution to pupils' social and personal development. It ranges from making a CD rack or large model of a steam boat to finely tuning one's voice in karaoke. These, in addition to many musical and sporting activities, mean that there is something for everyone. All pupils are encouraged to take part, particularly as almost all of the activities are available without extra payment. Each summer, pupils greatly benefit from an action-packed activity week that incorporates a wide range of exciting projects. Younger pupils stay on site, Year 6 rehearse their play, and Years 7 and 8 have residential challenges away from school.
- 2.4 The curriculum is further enriched by visits from people in the community and educational trips. The police talk about personal safety and the potential dangers of internet use, and, as part of their history studies, Year 5 have been to Hatfield House. Residential visits increase pupils' independence and Year 8 have recently benefited from a joint classics and geography trip to Pompeii and Herculaneum. Cross-curricular links are used when appropriate to stimulate pupils' understanding of a topic or theme. For example, Year 3 made an Egyptian irrigation device in DT, which was linked to their history and geography topic.
- 2.5 Pupils are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education. In interviews, Year 8 stated that they felt confident and ready to move on: "we are treated more like adults". They also mentioned that they tackle questions in their subjects that are like those used for

GCSE. These experiences, and the strong links with Mill Hill School, which they visit for hockey, swimming and joint music projects amongst other things, prepare them for the transfer in addition to the thorough PSHCE programme.

- 2.6 Curriculum planning is comprehensive and thorough. The ‘Through Curriculum’ document with details of learning from 3 to 18 years of age is a great strength of the school. It has addressed most efficiently the concerns raised about pupils’ continuous learning raised in the last inspection. This ‘Through Curriculum’ emphasises the unity of the Foundation and underpins its aims to support pupils from childhood towards adulthood, whilst ensuring the quality and uniqueness that is associated with the autonomy of a school for pupils aged 7 to 13. Planning within the curriculum shows great depth and breadth. Different tasks to match the varied needs of pupils are central to this planning. With the careful selection of pupils for their teaching groups, as well as the high quality of the provision for pupils who require learning support and those who have English as an additional language, all pupils have appropriate access to the curriculum.
- 2.7 Provision for pupils with statements of special educational needs and those who have been identified by the school as having LDD, is a strength, and continues to build effectively on the good foundations recognised at the time of the last inspection. Pupils with LDD are identified quickly and their needs met by a well-resourced and experienced department who also have good links with external agencies if needed. A comprehensive register is kept, and relevant, focused individual education plans are drawn up. These are reviewed regularly and efficiently. At all stages close links are maintained with parents and subject teachers. In-class support is combined with strategic withdrawal of pupils from their lessons in an imaginative and effective way. For example, in a Year 7 mathematics lesson four pupils started the topic in class with the support teacher. They then withdrew in order to reinforce and explore the topic in a smaller and more intensive setting. This was highly successful.
- 2.8 The school has responded to the criticism in the last inspection of its provision for high achieving pupils. A programme to identify those who are gifted and talented has been developed recently and tasks in class to challenge them have been incorporated into lesson planning. This is a great improvement, and the school plans to continue to review its provision for these pupils.
- 2.9 A few pupils with English as an additional language are extremely well supported and monitored by the LDD department. Subject teachers are advised on effective strategies and appropriate resources to use in lessons.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils’ Learning and Achievements

- 2.11 The school is successful in achieving its aims to motivate pupils in a stimulating environment in which they can achieve well across a wide range of activities and subjects. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding in all their subjects as well as in the activities that they undertake. They can think and act critically and creatively. Since the last inspection, standards achieved by the most able have improved, as was evident in the high quality of work observed in their individual projects and in response to challenging tasks in class.
- 2.12 Pupils of all abilities almost always achieve and progress well. In most lessons tasks were provided to suit groups and individuals so that all pupils were successful. In the few lessons where the teaching was less efficient, pupils’ progress and achievement were limited. Pupils were eager to ask questions so that they understood what they were learning and usually listened carefully to the answers. They learn to apply their knowledge as they have plenty of

opportunities to explore ideas for themselves and think critically. For example, in a Year 6 science lesson pupils felt confident enough to make a prediction about the possible outcome of an experiment even though others in the class took an opposing view. In art, DT and music, pupils demonstrate that they are extremely creative and can evaluate their own and others' work highly effectively.

- 2.13 Pupils' attainment in national tests at the age of 11 is high in relation to their abilities. Results over the last three years have been far above the national average for all maintained primary schools. Results in English have improved considerably recently. Pupils achieve well in their entry to senior schools at 11, and in their Common Entrance examinations. A significant proportion of pupils gain academic and non-academic awards to their senior schools.
- 2.14 Pupils achieve well in a wide range of individual and group activities, fulfilling the school's aim to contribute to a rich education for its pupils through extra-curricular activities. In 2007 51 pupils were awarded gold, silver or bronze certificates for their entries in the UK Mathematics Trust Challenge. Many pupils reach good standards in instrumental examinations, a number at the higher grades. Individual pupils have done well in poetry and history competitions as well as in a national general knowledge quiz. Several hockey and tennis players have been selected for county squads or training academies.
- 2.15 Pupils are extremely articulate, usually listen well and have good reading skills. Their writing is frequently of a high standard showing a strong sense of imagination and sensitivity to many issues. They take trouble in the presentation of their work. They enjoy conversing with each other and adults with whom they come into contact. They are able to make effective use of their understanding of mathematical concepts, applying them in their activities or when solving problems using Pythagoras's theorem or in probability experiments with dice. Their investigative skills are well developed. Pupils are skilled in their use of ICT. In science, Year 5 used electron microscopes with an interactive whiteboard to examine 'minibeasts' in detail.
- 2.16 Pupils have well-honed reasoning skills and are able to argue a point of view most cogently, explaining in lessons why they have decided on a particular answer or course of action. They rise to the challenges given to them for independent work in lessons and in projects, and they demonstrate that they can think for themselves. They can take notes and use the well-resourced library for research and personal study. Pupils usually work well as individuals and co-operate with others in their lessons. This co-operation also extends to activities such as plays, which involve a whole year group, teams and musical events, as well as collective support for charities. In their lessons and activities, pupils nearly always settle to work quickly and enthusiastically. They enjoy and persevere in what they are doing wholeheartedly.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.17 The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with some outstanding features. As at the last inspection, it strongly supports the Foundation's aims to educate young people within a Christian environment where they will learn respect for themselves and others.
- 2.18 Pupils have sufficient opportunities to develop their sense of spiritual awareness. Parents expressed strong support for the worthwhile attitudes promoted by the school. Staff give a strong lead in this and aspects of the curriculum support it, particularly PSHCE and religious education (RE). Chapel services give pupils time to pray, sing and reflect. A number of pupils are prepared for confirmation. Art, music and drama also foster an understanding of

matters beyond the material. High levels of self-esteem, self-knowledge and self-confidence are evident amongst pupils and are a direct result of positive staff/pupil relationships. Pupils interviewed were unequivocal in their appreciation of the teaching and non-teaching staff. The well-kept spacious grounds also support the school's intention to take pupils' spiritual development seriously by providing an environment where they can appreciate the natural world around them.

- 2.19 Pupils have a well-developed moral sense with a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong. They understand the rewards and sanctions system in the school and believe it to be fair. Throughout the inspection, pupils were generally polite, friendly, well mannered and properly behaved. Tutor time, supported by the excellent PSHCE programme, underpins this important aspect of school life.
- 2.20 Pupils' social development is outstanding. Pupils learn to take responsibility for each other through a successful "Buddy" system and a School Council, which genuinely makes a difference to the quality of communal life at school. The focus given to pupils with LDD and the understanding that they receive from staff has a significant influence on the way pupils respect each other. Responsibilities are given to pupils of all ages. The school's organisation of charitable giving is excellent. Apart from a commitment to regular giving via Harvest Festival, Christmas events, Red Nose Day and Jeans for Genes, the school's own 'OTI Day' has a profound influence for good throughout the whole-school community. This is a special day in memory of a past pupil. Everyone is responsible for planning their own fund-raising activities, which teaches not only social responsibility but also underpins the school's excellent Leadership Training programme for Years 5 to 8.
- 2.21 Pupils' cultural development is excellent, strongly supported by many aspects of the curriculum. Pupils learn about different religions in RE and life in other countries through English and geography. The school celebrates its multi-cultural pupil population. Visits to a Sikh place of worship and a Hindu Temple play an important part in teaching respect for other faiths and cultures. A visit to the London Museum provided an imaginative way of looking at the issue of immigration linking history, RE and geography. A Year 4 assembly led by pupils in Years 3 and 4 on the subject of Divali was outstanding. Themed lunchtimes and projects on such figures as Nelson Mandela all help to ensure that pupils at Belmont grow up in an atmosphere of tolerance and harmony.
- 2.22 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.23 The quality of teaching is good and a number of lessons observed were excellent. It strongly supports the school's aims and enables pupils of all abilities to learn and make progress. A particular feature of the successful teaching was the use of a wide range of teaching strategies to interest and engage all pupils. In addition, encouragement and attention are given to individual learners so that they feel extremely well supported.
- 2.24 Teaching ensures that pupils learn and think effectively. It encourages them to apply their intellectual, physical and creative abilities and fosters an interest in learning, a key aim of the school. Lessons are carefully planned. Teachers are well aware of the different abilities and needs of their pupils. Planning shows careful attention to matching tasks to these different abilities in order that pupils can achieve well at their own level. Most teachers have adapted their planning successfully so that the time available in longer lessons is used effectively. Lessons usually proceed at a brisk pace and varied activities engage pupils' attention so that they can learn efficiently. In less successful lessons, the pace was too slow and tasks were

- not varied enough to maintain pupils' interest throughout the time, and achievement was restricted.
- 2.25 Teachers are knowledgeable and share their enthusiasm with their pupils, stimulating them to learn. They also know their pupils well and understand their strengths and areas for improvement. This was observed in a Year 8 Latin lesson in which pupils were revising irregular verbs for their imminent examination. The pace was fast, expectations high and tasks varied from challenging class questioning and paired work to individual learning. Links were made between other European languages and at each point pupils' understanding was checked and reinforced. Pupils were encouraged to think and persevere and levels of achievement were high.
- 2.26 Teaching is supported by an excellent range of resources which is used effectively by teachers. Teachers make efficient use of their interactive whiteboards, but pupils' use of this technology is not yet exploited to the full. Specialist rooms are used well. The high quality of the display of pupils' work around the school underpins the value placed on individuals by their teachers and provides an excellent backdrop to the learning environment.
- 2.27 A comprehensive, thorough assessment and tracking system has been developed and this is proving an extremely useful tool to monitor pupils' progress and achievement. It provides all teachers with detailed and accurate information about their pupils. It is used to make the selection of pupils for different sets and streams as well as providing data for reports to parents. Many teachers use this assessment information in the future planning of their pupils' learning, but this practice is not yet consistent across the school. The school has identified this as an area for refinement as part of the assessment system.
- 2.28 The quality and consistency of marking were criticised at the last inspection. Marking has improved, but it is still not uniformly of a high standard across the school. Management is aware of this, and monitoring is in place to raise standards even higher. The positive marking is encouraging, and gives clear guidelines to pupils on how they can improve. Some marking is cursory with a tick at the bottom of the page with no comment. Teachers often discuss work in detail with pupils and give constructive verbal feedback as well as including targets for improvement. The use of worksheets in many subjects, particularly for younger pupils, does not always assist them in the organisation of their own work, nor provide sufficient challenge to the most able pupils who could do the work for themselves in their books. In addition, many of the sheets are undated and inconsistently marked so that they do not provide a useful means of tracking progress.
- 2.29 A positive atmosphere is engendered in lessons with much praise, which gives pupils confidence. In discussions pupils of all ages expressed the view that they could always ask for help when necessary. They explained that they were encouraged to try something for themselves, but knew that answers would be forthcoming if needed. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are strong and there is a sense of shared learning in most lessons.
- 2.30 National tests and standardised assessments are used for all pupils. These are carefully analysed to judge pupils' standards against national norms. They also give parents detailed information in considering senior schools for their children.
- 2.31 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 provision of pastoral care, welfare, health and safety has improved since the last inspection, and is now a strength of the school. Pupils receive highly effective support and guidance from staff, enabling them to become confident, articulate young people. Parents are greatly appreciative of the help and guidance given to their children. Pupils identify strongly with their form tutors who are primarily responsible for their pastoral care. Tutors support their form members, both in their academic work and in the reinforcement of the school rules regarding behaviour and conduct, so that pupils feel safe and individually well known. An unusual feature is the role of assistant-form tutor, which provides an additional layer of support to ensure continuity in the absence or unavailability of the form tutor. The medical centre is perceived as a source of great comfort and wisdom on personal matters amongst the pupils and a school counsellor is available for the whole-school community. GAP Year students offer further support for pupils. Pupils feel strongly that they do have people to turn to if they need advice or help with school-related and personal issues.
- 3.2 The pastoral structure is strong and works well. Staff understand the system; communication between them works efficiently, ably led by the pastoral deputy head. Staff have well-defined areas of responsibility, whilst being able to seek the guidance, advice and support of other colleagues. An additional facet is the evolution of the house system which is playing a greater role in the pastoral care of pupils.
- 3.3 The positive quality of relationships between staff and pupils is an important feature of life at Belmont. Pupils are usually polite and courteous, as the school expects them to be. They feel trusted by the staff to behave well. Most staff have a healthy rapport with pupils in the classroom, and interact and converse with them in a friendly, warm way that inspires confidence and respect. The 'Buddy' system is an outstanding feature in the development of good relationships between pupils of different ages and from different backgrounds.
- 3.4 The measures in place to promote good discipline and behaviour are firm and effective. The extensive communication with pupils and parents about the expectations for behaviour and the sanctions system means that they are familiar and satisfied with these arrangements. The clear anti-bullying policy highlights unacceptable behaviour and includes cyber-bullying and inappropriate use of mobile phones. Despite a very few pupil comments mentioning bullying in their pre-inspection questionnaires, at the time of inspection no evidence of bullying was found, and in interviews pupils felt that any difficulties that they might have would be dealt with quickly. Pupils are conscious of the ways in which they should promote a tolerant, comfortable atmosphere within the school.
- 3.5 The child protection measures in place are secure and successful. Governors have reviewed the policy and their Pastoral Committee takes a particular interest in all matters relating to this and the appropriate procedures to protect pupils. Parents are made aware, via the Parent Handbook, of the clear need to report to the appropriate agency any disclosure by a child. Statutory checks have been carried out on all staff, and those responsible for the supervision of children have been properly trained.
- 3.6 A medical room is supervised by full-time qualified staff and the care of pupils works well. Staff are kept well informed of the medical needs of their pupils. Accidents are carefully recorded. All necessary and appropriate measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken, and fire drills take place regularly. Health and safety arrangements are

particularly good and the school has high regard for statutory obligations which are all met. Risk assessments are extensively carried out, both in teaching classrooms and around the school premises, and regularly reviewed. Careful measures have been taken to ensure that pupils move safely around the buildings and premises. Levels of supervision are good. Many examples of staff highlighting safety issues in lessons were observed during the inspection. The systems for recording admissions and the use of attendance registers are appropriate. Pupils generally arrive punctually for their lessons. The school ensures that it meets its aim to provide a safe environment for its pupils.

- 3.7 The food provided at the school is nutritious with plenty of choice, and of a high standard. Menus are chosen to encourage pupils to eat a healthy diet, and consultation with the pupils takes place regularly to give them the opportunity to voice their opinions on what is available. When the kitchen team are planning a special themed lunch, they keep in close contact with the teaching staff. During the inspection week, pupils in Year 3 had prepared posters for the Mexican lunch, which introduced them to an unusual and delicious range of dishes.
- 3.8 The school meets all of the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.9 The school has built upon its links with parents and the community and these are now extremely strong. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents expressed overwhelming satisfaction with almost all aspects of the education provided for their children. Evidence from the inspection supports this. Parents choose Belmont for a holistic educational experience for their children which they feel they are receiving. A minority of parents expressed concern over the information that they receive about their children's work and progress and the opportunities to discuss them, and the way in which their concerns are handled. The inspection evidence did not support this view. Parents feel that the amount of homework is too onerous and this was accepted as a matter of concern. The school is undertaking a review of homework with a view to making appropriate changes if necessary. Many pupils with conscientious attitudes spend longer on homework than expected, which is an important factor in the parental perception of the volume of homework actually being set.
- 3.10 Parents are provided with a wide range of information on the work and progress of their children, which is communicated to them in a variety of ways. The weekly bulletin is seen as particularly informative. In addition, informal contact is encouraged. The staff are conscientious about being available for parents and communicating with them about any academic or pastoral concerns either by telephone or email. Valuable, constructive dialogue takes place at parent consultation evenings. The provision of fortnightly 'drop-in sessions' for discussions works well in Years 3 to 5 when parents can look at their children's books and speak to form tutors. This provision was deemed unnecessary for older pupils as, after a trial period, parents did not attend. Regular reports to parents have been improved since the last inspection. These now have focused information about pupils' attainment and progress, and ways for improvement are clearly identified.
- 3.11 Belmont actively welcomes parental involvement in the activities of the school. The level of participation by parents is their choice, ranging from attendance at social events or supporting school teams at matches to being a member of the Friends of Belmont Committee. Breakfast club is another excellent point of informal contact for parents, which enhances the family feel of the school.

- 3.12 The school handles the concerns of parents sensitively and conscientiously. The head and senior managers spend a significant proportion of time talking in person with parents and investigating their queries and worries. During the inspection, parents expressed the view that they felt that they were listened to and that any concerns were dealt with effectively and quickly. The procedure for formal complaints is satisfactory; it has not yet been used.
- 3.13 The school has many positive links with the wider community and is actively seeking to promote more. The neighbouring primary school holds its sports day in the grounds and some of its pupils attend the chess club. The cultural exhibition evenings celebrate the diversity of the school community itself. The choir sings at homes for older people at Christmas. Charitable giving is an important aspect of school life and strong links are maintained with the local parish.
- 3.14 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Governors give strong support to the school. Since the last inspection they have become more involved directly with the development planning of the school and have strengthened their role in monitoring all aspects of the education provided. The structure of the governing board, which is responsible for all the schools in the Foundation, continues to be clearly defined. Careful consideration is given to ensure that members of the board have a sufficient range of skills to support the schools. This enables them to give sufficient advice, challenge and guidance in upholding the ethos and standards of the schools.
- 4.2 Governors are kept well informed about the school as the head attends all meetings and provides detailed reports for them. The board also has an appropriate system of sub-committees. Members of the senior management team attend these committees when appropriate. Detailed minutes of all the committees show that governors are fully aware of issues arising within the schools. The Academic Committee receives regular presentations from subject department heads across the Foundation. This strongly supports the Foundation's aim to have a continuous curriculum across the schools, as well as indicating their appropriate concerns for the improvement of pupils' standards.
- 4.3 A link governor gives strong additional support to the school, visiting and meeting senior managers, staff and pupils on a regular basis. He has a shrewd understanding of issues relating to the school, and recognises that with the increase in pupil numbers space within the school is under pressure. This is particularly obvious in the science department. Plans are under consideration to improve these facilities.
- 4.4 Governors have also responded positively to the pupils in the school. The School Council put a proposal to the head that made a strong case for improved toilet facilities for boys and girls. This was accepted as a priority and taken to both the Estates Committee and the Pastoral Committee. The Estates Committee visited the school, plans were drawn up and the improvement implemented. Not only did this provide better accommodation, but it also demonstrated to pupils democracy in practice, as well as encouraging them to become responsible members of society.
- 4.5 Governors are aware of their legal responsibilities. They review child protection policies and procedures and the Pastoral Committee considers these matters carefully. Governors have undertaken careful financial planning and control and invested regularly to maintain the buildings well, in addition to improving resources on a regular basis.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.6 The school is extremely well led and managed. The head exercises strong, focused yet approachable leadership. She has a clear vision for the development of the school and the ethos that should prevail. This vision is ably supported by all those in management positions. It is shared across the whole school, as reflected in the quality of education provided for pupils. It also enables the school's aims to be achieved. Excellent links have been established at senior management level between the three Foundation schools.
- 4.7 Since the appointment of the head, systems for monitoring all aspects of the school have been developed and change implemented systematically. Thorough development planning now

takes place that incorporates departmental development as well as whole-school matters. The school's development plan is not yet linked in to a whole-Foundation strategic plan.

- 4.8 Middle management is highly effective. Heads of department are clear about their responsibilities and undertake regular lesson observations and book scrutiny to monitor teaching and learning. Strong links have been developed at departmental level with both Grimsdell and Mill Hill to ensure that the Foundation's aim to provide a consistent education for all its pupils is successful.
- 4.9 A great deal of work has taken place to develop appropriate departmental and whole-school policies and procedures. These have been efficiently implemented. Annual departmental reviews are well focused and identify areas for improvement. Whole-school policies are evaluated regularly.
- 4.10 Clear induction procedures provide excellent support for teachers who are new to the school. Performance management systems ensure that professional support for staff works well. This is enhanced by a wide range of in-service training available to staff, appropriately linked to individual professional needs and whole-school areas for development.
- 4.11 Financial resources are managed most efficiently to secure high quality resources that support the school's aims and enable the needs of the pupils to be met. The school buildings and extensive grounds are extremely well maintained and are an important feature of the school. They provide an attractive, varied and stimulating environment for the pupils at work and play. As noted at the last inspection, accommodation for science, DT, art and music is cramped. The school works hard to alleviate the impact of this on pupils' learning.
- 4.12 The day-to-day management of the school is highly efficient and strongly supported by the friendly administrative team.
- 4.13 The school meets the regulatory requirements for checking the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.14 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 highly successful in achieving its aims. The strong, focused leadership of the head has enabled the school to improve. Management and pastoral systems have been strengthened. The curriculum has been developed further to ensure that all pupils benefit from a balanced yet wide range of educational experiences, including an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities. The support for pupils who need additional help is highly successful. Parents are appreciative of the education provided and feel that their children are well supported. Pupils achieve well. Pupils feel that they are well known as individuals, and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They are successful in entry to their senior schools and a significant proportion of them gain awards. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Teaching is usually good and on a number of occasions it is excellent. Marking is not uniformly of a high standard across the school. The welfare of pupils is excellent, and an important feature of the school. Links with parents and the community have been improved, and are highly successful. Thorough assessment systems are in place to track the progress of pupils. Information from assessment is not yet used consistently across the school in planning for pupils' future learning.
- 5.2 The matters raised at the last inspection have been addressed successfully, except for the matter of consistency in marking and use of assessment in planning pupils' future learning. Management is aware of these issues and has developed procedures to improve them. Extremely efficient systems for school development, self-evaluation and monitoring all aspects of the school are in place. Governors provide strong support for the school as they are involved more directly with development planning and have strengthened their role in monitoring all aspects of the education provided. In-service training has been provided so that most teachers have high expectations of their pupils and provide a range of activities to meet their needs. Planning is now consistent and works effectively so that pupils learn in a systematic way at all ages.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school should take the following steps in order to build on the existing provision.
1. Allow a period of time for consolidation, and develop an achievable system for reviewing the new management initiatives of longer lessons, the mechanism for tracking pupils' progress and closer monitoring of teaching and learning.
 2. Continue to develop the new assessment system, so that the information gained is used consistently across the school in planning for pupils' future learning.
 3. Management should continue to monitor the quality of marking regularly, to improve and ensure its consistency and usefulness to pupils.
- 5.5 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 5th to 8th November 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Lady Fiona Mynors	Reporting Inspector
Dr Robert Acheson	Head, IAPS school
Mrs Janet Cooper	Head, ISA junior school
Mr Bryan Kane	Director of Studies, IAPS school
Mrs Samantha Michau	Director of Studies, HMC junior school
Mr Richard Walden	Head, ISA school