



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

THE ELMS SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

The Elms School

Full Name of School	The Elms School		
DfE Number	884/6001		
Registered Charity Number	843499		
Address	The Elms School Colwall Malvern Worcestershire WR13 6EF		
Telephone Number	01684 540344		
Fax Number	01684 541174		
Email Address	office@elmsschool.co.uk		
Headmaster	Mr Alastair Thomas		
Chair of Governors	Mr Christopher Potter O.B.E., M.A.		
Age Range	3 to 13		
Total Number of Pupils	179		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (92 boys; 87 girls)		
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS):	15	11-13: 63
	5-11:	101	
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	113	
Number of Boarders	Total:	66	
	Full:	66	Capacity for flexi-boarding: 67
Head of EYFS Setting	Mrs Bella Barron		
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection dates	01 Feb 2011 to 02 Feb 2011		
	02 March 2011 to 05 March 2011		

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in April 2005.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of boarding was not carried out in conjunction with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills, and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report refers to an inspection in June 2008 and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Children's social care/Boarding school.

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

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

CONTENTS

	Page
1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL	1
2 THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL	2
(a) Main findings	2
(b) Action points	3
(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements	3
(ii) Recommendations for further improvement	3
3 THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS	4
(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills	4
(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)	5
(c) The contribution of teaching	6
4 THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	7
(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils	7
(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety	8
(c) The quality of boarding education	9
5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	10
(a) The quality of governance	10
(b) The quality of leadership and management	10
(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians	11
6 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE	12
(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	12
(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	12
(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	12
(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	13
INSPECTION EVIDENCE	14

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 The Elms is an independent co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged three to thirteen years of age. It is situated in the village of Colwall, near the town of Malvern, Worcestershire, in a rural setting. The school, which is administered by a board of governors, was founded by the philanthropist Humphrey Walwyn in 1614, in association with the City of London livery company, The Worshipful Company of Grocers. The school aims to enable each pupil to realise his or her academic and physical potential and to foster positive attitudes to learning and life.
- 1.2 The school is a combination of old and new buildings. There are several sports fields, and tennis courts, an indoor swimming pool, a theatre incorporating a music centre, a sports hall and an all-weather playing surface. Attached to the school is a working farm. Since the previous inspection there have been a number of significant changes. The present headmaster and the boarding housemaster were appointed in September 2010. The head of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was appointed in 2008, and children in the EYFS are now educated in line with the Montessori principles for early years education.
- 1.3 The school currently has 179 pupils on roll. Fifteen pupils, of whom seven are part-time, are in the EYFS located in the pre-preparatory department on the ground floor of the school building. Pupils in the pre-preparatory department are all day pupils. In the main school, all pupils are either full or flexi-boarders. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Forty-seven pupils are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and receive support from the school. Five pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), and receive support from the school.
- 1.4 The school is non-selective and there is no joining requirement other than confirmation that the education offered will meet the needs of the pupil. The school's ability profile is above the national average, rising slightly through the school, with a fairly wide spread of abilities represented.
- 1.5 Pupils come from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds. Most belong to families in professional, farming or business occupations.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 The school is most successful in achieving its aim to provide a friendly, caring environment where every pupil achieves their academic and physical potential. From the EYFS onwards, pupils are very well educated and achieve high standards in both their learning and personal development. They are judged to make good progress in relation to their abilities because of a good curriculum and an excellent programme of activities both in and outside school. Teaching is good, but marking, although regular, is variable in quality and the use of assessment data to monitor the pupils' progress is still in its early stages. As noted during the previous inspection information and communication technology (ICT) remains underdeveloped as a tool for learning. Pupils with LDD and those with EAL, also make good and sometimes rapid progress. Excellent attitudes to their work also contribute to pupils' academic achievement, as do their exemplary behaviour and their excellent relationships with each other and their teachers.
- 2.2 Effective arrangements to ensure the pupils' welfare, health and safety, together with excellent pastoral care, support their outstanding personal development. The good quality of boarding contributes much to the pupils' experience. In the pupils' questionnaire responses pupils were positive about the school. A small number indicated that they do not consider there to be enough activities for boarders in the evenings and at weekends. Inspection findings do not support these views. The pupils' care for each other is embedded in all aspects of school life. Older pupils develop supportive relationships with younger pupils. Staff provide excellent support and guidance, and pupils say that there is always someone to whom they can talk. Pupils' keen interest in being responsible citizens is evident in their charitable giving.
- 2.3 Governance is good and enables the school to meet its aims effectively. The governors' oversight is well informed and ensures the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of pupils. Good leadership and management overall, and outstanding leadership of the EYFS, effectively support the high quality education pupils receive. Most of the recommendations from the previous report have been implemented. The school has instituted a development plan but this is currently limited in effectiveness. Appraisal of academic staff has been begun but is at an early stage of development, as is the monitoring of teaching and learning. Staff recruitment procedures are rigorous in all the required checks. Links with parents are excellent. Reports to parents are detailed and comprehensive but do not indicate clearly enough what their children need to do to improve. The parents' replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire show that most are very happy with the school, especially its breadth of curriculum, the progress their children make, and the pastoral care they receive. A small number of parents indicated that they do not think the school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities. No evidence to support these views was found during the inspection.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Improve marking and assessment to ensure that all marking offers clear guidance for improvement, and assessment data is used to guide target setting and planning.
2. Improve ICT resources so that it can be used to support the curriculum and for it to be used consistently as a tool for learning throughout the school including in the EYFS.
3. Define more clearly and develop the academic staff appraisal system to provide more opportunities for staff professional development and in-service training.
4. Reshape the school's development plan to reflect the views of the whole community and include more focused, prioritised aims, financial implications, and criteria for judging success.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' overall achievement is excellent, as is the quality of their learning, attitudes and skills. The school meets its aims to maximise the potential of every pupil whatever their starting point.
- 3.2 Pupils are articulate and express themselves with confidence in speech, and creatively through art, music and drama. Their writing skills are excellent, and well presented; high-quality written work is produced showing independent thought and creativity. For example, in English, younger pupils were able to produce convincing arguments, and use persuasive language effectively, in writing letters from Goldilocks explaining her actions to the police.
- 3.3 Pupils have well-developed numeracy skills for their age and ability, with some pupils attaining well above expectation. Older pupils were able to derive a formula for the 'nth term' of a sequence, and showed a clear understanding of the use of algebra in problem solving. The pupils' scientific knowledge and skills are good, and they use scientific vocabulary with confidence; older pupils could describe accurately the patterns of chemical behaviour during acid rain weathering. Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology as a tool to develop pupils independent learning skills throughout the curriculum.
- 3.4 Pupils, including those with LDD and EAL, achieve high standards within their individual capabilities. They work hard and achieve well in a wide range of activities, including in rugby and hockey competitions at county and national level, and, as individuals, in a range of sports including riding, swimming, athletics and Triathlon. They also enjoy success in national mathematics challenges and music examinations and achieve high standards of choral singing. Working together is a strength of the school, and pupils demonstrate their ability to do so with great success frequently, especially in rural studies, sport, music and staged productions.
- 3.5 The pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance against national tests. From evidence in lessons, interviews with pupils and work scrutinised during the inspection it is judged to be good. This level of attainment indicates that pupils make good progress over time in relation to their ability. Pupils with particular talents achieve well. They make particularly rapid progress in response to tasks with levels of challenge appropriate to their potential. The majority of pupils each year gain a place at the school of their choice for secondary education, several with scholarships or awards. Well-planned lessons and effective teaching, contribute significantly to the good progress pupils make.
- 3.6 Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and this contributes to their successful achievement. From a very young age they settle easily to work and apply themselves well in their tasks and activities.

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

- 3.7 Curricular provision is good and successfully meets the school's aims. The school maintains an effective balance between preparing pupils thoroughly for transfer examinations to senior schools and providing a broad education covering all the required areas of learning both in and out of the classroom.
- 3.8 The curriculum is effective in promoting the pupils' high standards in their learning and personal development whilst providing a good range of creative, linguistic and technological experiences. In addition to all National Curriculum subjects, it includes rural studies, French, Latin and religious education (RE).
- 3.9 A distinctive feature of the curriculum is rural studies. This subject affords a unique experience for pupils encompassing care and welfare of animals, responsibility and food production, through to more traditional aspects of science, geography and horticulture.
- 3.10 The curriculum is well planned to meet the pupils' individual needs. Provision for those with LDD and EAL is excellent, with efficient measures for individual and group support and thorough monitoring of progress. The school makes effective arrangements for scholars, through its 'ladder system' where pupils start in the class commensurate with their chronological age, but may be moved up to the next year group if this is considered appropriate.
- 3.11 The curriculum includes good arrangements for transition between different stages of the pupils' education. Information on pupils joining Year 1 from the EYFS is transferred effectively, and the needs of any who have not yet achieved all the Early Learning Goals are addressed well. Pupils in Year 3 make a smooth transition to Year 4 and pupils in Year 8 are well prepared to move to their choice of senior school with confidence.
- 3.12 Since the last inspection ICT resources remain underdeveloped. This restricts the development of pupils' independent learning skills and their opportunities for study and research. Library facilities have been improved and there is now a good range of fiction books. However, the library's dual use as a base for social meetings limits the shelf space and restricts its use for independent research by pupils. Science facilities are cramped and a number of science lessons are taught in classrooms rather than in the science laboratory. This limits the range of practical experiences which can be offered to pupils.
- 3.13 An extensive choice of extra-curricular activities enhances personal development and enables them to extend their interests and skills. These range from riding, swimming, Triathlon, table tennis and pop lacrosse to choral singing, debating, chess and dance. Many pupils learn musical instruments both individually and in groups. The ethos of the school encourages all pupils to take part in as many activities as possible with a clear emphasis on fun and personal achievement. There is, therefore, a wide range of opportunities for pupils to represent the school in sport, and to perform in music or drama.
- 3.14 Work in class is enriched by an excellent programme of trips, and visits, where the strong practical focus helps bring learning to life. An excellent Year 8 leavers' programme helps pupils to prepare for life in senior school. There are also residential trips and an 'Outward Bound' camp organised for older pupils which

make a significant contribution to their personal development through fostering leadership skills, team spirit and awareness and respect for each other's capabilities.

- 3.15 The pupils' education is further enhanced through a variety of links with the local community. Pupils horizons are extended, and their understanding of the needs of others enhanced, by their charity collections to support a number of national and international charities.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.16 The pupils' achievements are strongly promoted by good teaching that is well-informed, interesting and helpful. Occasionally teaching is excellent. The positive relationships between staff and pupils promote successful learning throughout the school in line with its aims. Pupils enjoy a highly productive rapport with their teachers, and the majority of lessons are characterised by an air of mutual respect. As a result of positive encouragement, pupils remain focused, and exemplary behaviour is the norm.
- 3.17 Teachers provide pupils with a variety of ways in which to learn including working as individuals, working cooperatively, engaging them in written tasks, discussion, debate and role play. Such variety is appreciated by pupils who say that they enjoy their lessons and appreciate the efforts their teachers make to help them.
- 3.18 The best teaching is typified by strong subject knowledge and enthusiasm, rapid pace and excellent use of questioning techniques. In these lessons, pupils are fully engaged and participate actively in their learning. In the small number of lessons where teaching does not engage pupils fully enough in their own learning, and time management is poor, pupils lose focus and become distracted.
- 3.19 Assessment procedures are good overall. The pupils' work is marked regularly but marking is variable in quality. The best practice provides excellent encouragement and targets are set for pupils to achieve. However, a significant amount of marking is sparse and does not record suggestions for improvement. Teachers use a variety of methods to check the pupils' knowledge and understanding within the classroom, including written and oral tests, quizzes and end of topic mini-assessments.
- 3.20 The school uses a variety of nationally standardised achievement tests to measure the pupils' progress. The use of this data to balance objective and subjective analysis of the pupils' performance, and to enable pupils to make progress by identifying strengths and weaknesses in core subjects, is still in its early stages.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent and is effectively supported by a nurturing school community. The attitudes and outlook of all pupils reflects the school's aim to prepare them to progress to the next stage of their education with self-confidence, knowledge and ideals.
- 4.2 Pupils have an excellent sense of the spiritual. They are self-confident, friendly and have high levels of self-esteem, encouraged through the celebration of their achievements. The school's chapel provides opportunities for pupils and staff to come together for collective worship and pupils learn to reflect, to listen, to show respect and to be aware of the needs of those around them. They have an appreciation of what is beautiful, for example when looking at art work and sculpture. Pupils of all ages take great pleasure in their rural surroundings and are sensitive to the wonders of nature, as exemplified by the excitement and pleasure displayed by pupils at the recent birth of piglets on the school farm.
- 4.3 The pupils' excellent moral awareness is at the heart of the life of the school and is carefully nurtured through assemblies, circle time and the PSHE programme. They understand the difference between right and wrong and show respect for the school and its rules. The behaviour of older pupils contributes to the smooth running of the school and to a well-developed sense of community. Pupils are enthusiastic when raising money for their chosen charities. They are very clear about the difference their support makes to the lives of those less fortunate than themselves.
- 4.4 The pupils' social development is outstanding. They display an appropriate understanding of public institutions. Effective leadership skills are shown in response to opportunities for responsibility which older pupils have in houses, sports teams and for younger pupils. The school councils enable pupils to put forward ideas for school improvement. Recent examples of their achievements include an increase in the number of extra-curricular activities and the rescheduling of the main Sunday meal. Rural studies instils a strong sense of responsibility in pupils, many of whom help to take care of the animals on the school farm.
- 4.5 Pupils have a good appreciation of, and respect for, their own and other cultures. RE makes a considerable contribution. Pupils explore all major faiths and study not only the differences between them, but also those features they have in common, as experienced by pupils on visits to a mosque and a synagogue. An extensive programme of educational visits both in this country and abroad enriches the pupils' knowledge of their own and other countries' traditions and cultures. Involvement in concerts, learning about famous artists, and taking part in and watching drama productions add depth to their cultural experiences.

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

- 4.6 The quality of pastoral care, welfare, health and safety is good and supports the pupils' excellent personal development. Pastoral care is excellent. This supports the school's aims of fostering supportive relationships and allowing each pupil to enjoy a sense of self-worth. In response to pre-inspection questionnaires most pupils indicated that they are extremely happy in school.
- 4.7 All staff provide strong support and guidance for pupils both within and outside lessons. They give freely of their time to help and support pupils, who appreciate this greatly. Form tutors are primarily responsible for the pupils' pastoral care and they feel that any problems they may have are quickly and effectively addressed. Staff and pupils enjoy relaxed but mutually respectful relationships and pupils work and play together well. Both day and boarding pupils say they feel cared for and valued as individuals. Throughout the school, pastoral arrangements are very effective and monitored well, and lines of communication and responsibility are clear and well understood.
- 4.8 Policies to promote good discipline and behaviour are firmly in place and effective, and deal constructively with unacceptable behaviour. The school has high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and manners, and it is exemplary. A warm, calm, civilised atmosphere prevails at school and pupils readily help each other and appreciate and celebrate each others' success. Older pupils say they are confident there is always someone to whom they can turn and that they feel happy and safe in school.
- 4.9 Safeguarding arrangements are good. Suitable training is given to all staff, including those with specific responsibilities, and procedures are clearly understood. Access for those with physical or learning needs is effectively planned for. The school maintains appropriate admission and attendance registers. Excellent arrangements exist for pupils who feel unwell, including for boarders, and these are operated sensitively, in conjunction with a good first aid policy. Detailed records are kept and all relevant information passed on most efficiently. A generous number of qualified first aiders, including paediatric first aiders, is on the staff. Measures to prevent risks of fire and other hazards are good, as are arrangements for health and safety on educational visits.
- 4.10 The school promotes healthy living extremely well. The vast range of physical activities in and out of curriculum time offer ample opportunity to pursue a healthy lifestyle and pupils acquire a good appreciation of how to stay healthy, through their learning in science, rural studies and in PSHE. Healthy eating is encouraged by the provision of nutritious meals. These are almost universally popular with the pupils who eat well and understand the need for a balanced diet.

4.(c) The quality of boarding education

- 4.11 The school is fully committed to boarding and the good quality of boarding at The Elms contributes much to the pupils' education and personal development, as reflected in the school's aims. The provision for every pupil in the main school to sleep at school provided by flexi-boarding is a particular strength ensuring no separation between day pupils and boarders and helping to develop a strong sense of belonging amongst all pupils.
- 4.12 The boarding accommodation is homely and welcoming. The boys' accommodation is of a good standard, with relaxation areas in the dormitories. The girls' accommodation is of a particularly high standard including a well-appointed common room. There is also a general common room for all boarders to mix happily during recreational times.
- 4.13 The majority of recommendations made in the latest Ofsted report have been addressed, and both the training and the supervision of boarding staff have been improved since the last inspection. The boys' showers remain an area for improvement.
- 4.14 Relationships amongst boarders are excellent and the younger boarders are appreciative of the support offered by their dormitory prefects. Boarding staff are always on hand, promoting excellent relationships between adults and pupils. Staff have accommodation adjacent to the boarding areas to offer support for any pupil who needs it.
- 4.15 In response to the pre-inspection questionnaires most boarders indicated that they very much enjoy the boarding experience and when interviewed, those in both full and flexi-boarding said how positive they feel about it. A small minority indicated that there are not enough facilities and activities available to boarders in the evening and at weekends. No evidence to support these views was found during the inspection.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 Governance is good, and supports the school's aims well. Governors are appointed from relevant professions and careful arrangements are made for their selection, induction and training. Through an effective structure of committees covering all aspects of the school's provision, they provide effective oversight of the school and discharge their duties capably. Through frequent reports and visits to the school where they meet with pupils, staff and parents, and close liaison between the chair and the headmaster, the governing body has a clear insight into the working of the school and provides strong support combined with high expectations for continued improvement.
- 5.2 Governors are very knowledgeable about the school, aware of its strengths and the areas where improvements are needed. A number of governors are parents of current or former pupils, so they are in a good position to set appropriate aims and values for the school in keeping with the ethos. Financial oversight and arrangements are careful and thorough, and considerable investment is made in staff and resources.
- 5.3 Governors are fully aware of, and effective in discharging, their responsibilities for child protection, welfare, health and safety throughout the school. This is achieved through the appointment of members with relevant experience, the use of expert advice as necessary, and regular review of procedures.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.4 The school, is well led and effective overall in ensuring that its aims are met. Leadership and management of the EYFS is outstanding. The senior management team work tirelessly to ensure that learning is an enjoyable experience in a stimulating family environment. The success of the leadership and management is reflected in the pupils' outstanding personal and social skills, the excellent pastoral care and the good quality of the boarding experience, pupils' success in gaining entry to the senior schools of their choice and in the strong support of the parents as reflected in the pre-inspection questionnaire.
- 5.5 On a day-to-day basis the school runs very smoothly. Teaching, non-teaching, welfare, catering, maintenance and administrative staff effectively support the ethos of the school. They work together with the pupils to create an excellent sense of community, and take much pride and pleasure in the school.
- 5.6 The school has addressed many issues highlighted during the previous inspection. Links between different stages of the pupils' education have been strengthened to ensure continuity in the curriculum. Teaching and learning have been strengthened by the development of assessment procedures, and subject coordinators manage their own subjects well, although monitoring of marking still lacks consistency. Since the previous inspection the school has devised a written development plan. This plan looks successfully towards the school's future, but does not currently represent the views of the whole school community. Targets lack a sense of priority and implications of cost, and focus and criteria to define and acknowledge success are not clearly laid out. Staff appraisal has been instituted. It is at an early stage of development and does not lead consistently to focused development and training for

staff. The leadership and management team are aware of the need to define and develop the staff appraisal system more rigorously to provide more opportunities in these areas.

- 5.7 Appropriate care is taken over all aspects of staff recruitment, such as checks on suitability and the recording of these checks, as well as ensuring effective staff induction and all other necessary policies and risk assessments are accurately and efficiently undertaken.

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

- 5.8 The school maintains excellent relationships with parents, carers and guardians and takes considerable care to communicate effectively and involve them in the life of the school in line with its aims. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicate that most parents are extremely positive about the school and are particularly appreciative of the high standards their children achieve and of the nurturing care and support the school provides. Inspectors agree with these views.
- 5.9 Parents have many opportunities to be involved in their children's education through concerts and assemblies, helping on school visits or volunteering on a regular basis to help with activities in school.
- 5.10 All necessary information, including policies and procedures, is posted on the school website and parents of pupils and prospective pupils are provided with extensive and relevant information about the school. The termly *Pre-Prep and School Notes* are informative and effectively showcase the many school activities.
- 5.11 Parents receive detailed feedback on their children's achievement and progress, but reports provide limited information on what the pupils need to do to improve. Parents of pupils in Year 8 are supported most effectively in their children's transition to the next stage of their education.
- 5.12 The school operates an open door policy and parents are encouraged to come into school to discuss any problems. As a result most concerns or queries are dealt with swiftly and informally. There are clear procedures for dealing with parental complaints and any concerns are handled sensitively in line with school policy.
- 5.13 A small number of parents indicated that they do not think the school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities. No evidence to support these views was found during the inspection.

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

6. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

6.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.1 The overall effectiveness of the EYFS is outstanding. The calm welcoming family atmosphere enables all children to settle and make significant progress in their learning and development. The individual needs of children are met very well. Since the last inspection, considerable improvements have been made to the setting. The increase in numbers of appropriately trained staff and a more rigorous procedure for recording and tracking the progress of each child have had a most positive effect on children's learning and personal development.

6.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.2 Leadership and management are outstanding. Effective policies are implemented successfully to safeguard children and eliminate discrimination. Excellent links with parents and relevant outside agencies contribute significantly to children's welfare and development. Parents are encouraged to share life and work skills with the children and to play an active part in their development. Parents receive regular reports detailing their children's progress which are the products of careful observations and very detailed tracking. All EYFS staff regularly attend training as part of their self-development. Those in charge of the setting have a clear vision of the way forward and regular departmental meetings are held to plan and prioritise further improvements.

6.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.3 The quality of the provision is outstanding. Children to learn well and make rapid progress. They develop their imagination and acquire considerable problem-solving skills through learning to choose from, and use, a wide range of specialized resources. However, the use of ICT is not fully developed. Links between the indoor and outdoor classroom are good and the expansive school grounds provide excellent opportunities for enhancing the children's knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creativity, including through role play. An excellent balance is struck between child-initiated and adult-led activities. Rigorous recording and extremely effective tracking enables an accurate profile of each child to be produced. This is used to inform staff about the next steps in their learning, and parents of the child's progress. Children's welfare is a high priority and they are taught about being safe in many contexts, such as how to carry and use scissors safely and discussions of safety issues before trips. Detailed risk assessments for all aspects of the setting including outings, together with regular checks of equipment, create a safe environment.

6.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 6.4 Outcomes for the children are outstanding. From different starting points children make substantial progress towards the achievement of the Early Learning Goals. By the end of the EYFS, most children achieve high standards in all six areas of learning. They clearly enjoy learning, working very well both individually and co-operatively. They take part in any activity enthusiastically and are keen to share their experiences with others. By the end of Nursery most can recognise colours, shapes and words, and are able to tie bows, undo buttons and operate zips after using the specialized dressing frame. Many are on course to exceed expectations in early writing and numeracy by the end of Reception. Most are able to control movements of their bodies with increasing confidence, as was seen in a yoga class, and children show excellent creative and imaginative skills when painting pictures. Children feel safe within the setting and talk freely to adults. They understand that physical exercise and healthy eating, together with personal hygiene are essential for a healthy lifestyle. They are developing considerable skills for the future and are inquisitive, industrious and articulate. They exhibit exemplary behaviour and relate extremely well to one another and adults.

Section 2 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision.

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 boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Felicity Lawson

Reporting Inspector

Mr Andrew Cowell

Head, IAPS school

Mrs Linda Swain

Head of Department, HMC school

Mr Richard Balding

Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector