



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION
HOLMWOOD HOUSE SCHOOL**

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Holmwood House School

Full Name of School	Holmwood House School
DfE Number	881/6016
EYFS Number	EY362183
Address	Holmwood House School Chitts Hill Lexden Colchester Essex CO3 9ST England
Telephone Number	01206 574305
Fax Number	01206 768269
Email Address	headmaster@holmwood.essex.sch.uk
Headmaster	Mr Alexander Mitchell
Chair of Directors	Mrs Wendy Trott
Age Range	6 months to 4 years (Nursery School) 4 to 13 (Preparatory School)
Total Number of Pupils	Nursery 109 School 286
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (257 boys; 138 girls)
Numbers by Age	0-3 (EYFS): 51 5-11: 286 3-5 (EYFS): 58
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 219
Number of Boarders	Total: Up to 65 (Flexi) Full: 0 Flexi: Up to 65
EYFS Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	23 to 26 June 2015

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 February 2010 (Standard), November 2013 (Boarding and Early Years Foundation Stage).

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) Regulations 2014. The range of these Regulations can be viewed on the website 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.

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 31 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 Education (DfE) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

This inspection contains 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, personal development and welfare.

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', 'requires improvement' 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 the board of directors and an advisor to the board, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the boarding house 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

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Reporting Inspector

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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 learning	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	8
(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils	8
(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care	9
(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety	10
(d) The quality of boarding	10
5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	13
(a) The quality of governance	13
(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians	13
6 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE	16
(a) How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend	16
(b) The contribution of the early years provision to children's well-being	16
(c) The leadership and management of the early years provision	17
(d) The overall quality and standards of the early years provision	18

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Located near Colchester in Essex, Holmwood House is a preparatory school and nursery offering an independent education for boys and girls between the ages of six months and thirteen years. From the age of eight, pupils can board on a weekly or flexible basis. The school was founded in 1922 to educate boys and became co-educational in 1985. Except for war-time evacuation, the preparatory school has remained on the same site, with the nursery being located three miles away. The school was privately owned until 2007 when it was taken over by a family trust. A board of two directors now administers the school as a limited company. Appointed in 2009, the headmaster is the head of the preparatory school but has overall responsibility for the nursery also, although this operates independently on a day-to-day basis under the direction of the nursery managers.
- 1.2 The school aims to develop the individuality of each child, helping them to achieve their full potential in all areas of their learning and to encourage high self-esteem so that pupils are happy and self-confident learners, who are capable of independent thought and have enquiring minds. It plans to do this through the provision of a rich, diverse, broad and balanced curriculum within a safe, secure and caring environment, which promotes courtesy and consideration, so that pupils can be well prepared for the outside world.
- 1.3 A total of 286 pupils attend the preparatory school and 109 pupils attend the nursery. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is split between two sites. Children up to four years of age attend the nursery, which is a self-contained building with outside play areas. Children can attend up to 47 weeks of the year or term-time only with 68 boys and 41 girls currently registered. In the year in which they become five, children can transfer to Reception, which is located on the main site and forms an integral part of the preparatory school. There are 23 boys and 10 girls in Reception. Of the 253 pupils in Years 1 to 8, 166 are boys and 87 girls. The majority of pupils come from professional and business families and are of white British origin. There are four pupils who originate from overseas. The school is non-denominational but follows broadly Christian values. Most pupils live within a 15 mile radius of the school.
- 1.4 The ability profile of pupils is slightly above the national average, but with a wide spread. There are three pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL), one of whom receives specialist support. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan, but of 44 pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), 40 receive specialist learning support.
- 1.5 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 quality of pupils' achievements and learning is excellent, fulfilling the school's aims. From the EYFS onwards, pupils make excellent progress in all areas of the curriculum and experience considerable success in a wide range of activities, which has a significant impact upon their confidence and self-esteem. Standards of literacy and numeracy are particularly high. The quality of teaching is excellent, meeting well the needs of all pupils, including the most able and those who have SEND or EAL. Standards of provision in the EYFS are outstanding, contributing well to the children's welfare. From Year 1, curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent, supporting the high standard of pupils' achievements. The curriculum is broad and well balanced across all subject areas, although the limited availability of equipment means that pupils do not make enough use of information and communication technology (ICT) in their learning across the curriculum. The school recognises this and has plans to improve matters in the immediate future. Pupils of all ages, including those children in the EYFS, display excellent attitudes to learning, being diligent and eager to undertake new challenges. A particular strength is their ability to work independently through research and investigation.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is excellent. They grow into reflective, confident members of a cohesive community. In the EYFS, they learn to share and work co-operatively to achieve a goal. As they mature, their behaviour towards one another is characterised by care and kindness. Strong social awareness is evident in their understanding of political issues and the principles of democracy. Excellent systems to provide guidance and support are well implemented so that all pupils, including those in the EYFS, thrive in a warm and welcoming environment. The opportunity to board on a flexible basis for one night or more is well supported and greatly enjoyed by pupils, having a highly positive impact upon their educational experiences. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire confirmed that their child enjoyed boarding. The school has excellent procedures for safeguarding pupils and for their welfare, health and safety. A small number of errors in the recording of staff checks, including in the EYFS, were immediately rectified but did not compromise the safety of pupils.
- 2.3 The directors are fully committed to fulfilling the aims of the school and have strengthened governance significantly through the appointment of advisors. Oversight of educational standards, finance, accommodation and resources is effective in ensuring the continuance of high standards in all sections of the school, including EYFS, by providing suitable challenge and stimulus for continued self-evaluation and growth. Although standards are high, oversight of matters pertaining to boarding is less thorough. Governance has recognised the need for more informed scrutiny of provision and care as an area for future development. The school has taken appropriate action to implement all of the recommendations from the previous full inspection in 2010 and the intermediate early years and boarding inspections in 2013. In close partnership with senior leaders, a comprehensive plan for future development is in place and the school has complied with all statutory regulations, including those pertaining to EYFS. Links with parents are a major strength. Considerable satisfaction was expressed with the general education provided so that almost all parents felt that the school was well led and managed and that they would recommend the quality of provision and care to others.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

- 2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.
- 2.5 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015.
- 2.6 See the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage section 6 for the inspection findings in relation to the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 for children under three.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.7 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
 - 1. Ensure that directors understand the most recent requirements for the quality of boarding provision and care.
 - 2. Extend formal opportunities for all staff to observe excellent teaching.

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' achievement and learning is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils are well educated in accordance with the school's aims, demonstrating excellent levels of understanding, knowledge and skills across the full range of the curriculum as well as in extra-curricular activities. They speak confidently and clearly from an early age, using mature vocabulary to articulate their thoughts; for example a Year 1 pupil encouraged her friend to be more resilient when learning a new skill. They are highly literate and can write both creatively and factually in a wide range of genres. Their numeracy skills are well developed and are thoughtfully applied to solve problems logically. They achieve well in science so that they can hypothesize, pursue a line of enquiry independently and reach a probable solution. They show high levels of creativity, especially in art and in extra-curricular activities. They have well developed physical skills and enjoy teamwork. Their ICT skills are sound but the use of technology as a tool to support their learning and to aid independent research is currently hampered by the limited available resources.
- 3.3 Pupils are successful in a wide range of activities and this has a significant impact on their personal development in terms of confidence and self-esteem. Pupils have gained success at a high level in a range of sports. Individual and team performances at both regional and national level are amongst their numerous successes; for example, the girls' cricket team reached the national finals and individual pupils have gained success in horse-riding, sailing and swimming. Over half of the pupils learn a musical instrument with a good number of pupils achieving distinction in external examinations. In recent years, all pupils have been successful in gaining places at their first choice of senior schools; a significant proportion of pupils receive scholarships to senior schools. In 2015, over half of pupils in Year 8 were awarded scholarships in recognition of their excellent achievements in academic subjects, music, sport and all-round achievement.
- 3.4 Pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to performance against a fixed national average, but on the evidence available from lesson observations, scrutiny of work and interviews with staff and pupils, it is judged to be high in relation to national age-related expectations. The pupils follow a demanding programme, engaging successfully in advanced work in all subjects, including classical and modern foreign languages.
- 3.5 This level of attainment means that pupils make rapid progress relative to those with similar abilities. Able and gifted pupils achieve distinction in academic work because they are offered challenging activities, well-matched to their abilities. Talented pupils are notably accomplished in their areas of expertise, such as art and drama. Achievement of pupils with SEND or EAL is excellent, evident in the increasing level of complexity in their work and in the carefully tracked improvements noted in standardised tests and examination results.
- 3.6 In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all parents stated that they were pleased with the progress made by their children, including those who are gifted or talented or have SEND. In meetings and in their responses to the questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of pupils agreed that that they made good progress. Inspection evidence confirmed that pupils achieve highly and that their excellent progress is well supported because of their attitudes to learning. They are

most commonly eager to undertake new challenges, using a wide variety of learning strategies such as note-taking and mind-mapping. A particular strength of their approach is their enthusiasm to research and investigate independently, asking for help only when they have made diligent efforts to complete the task independently.

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

- 3.7 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.8 The school offers an excellent curriculum which supports fully the school's aims to provide a wide range of quality activities and opportunities. The curriculum covers all requisite areas of learning. Predominantly class-based teaching in Years 1 and 2 provides a secure framework and is enhanced by specialist teaching in music, PE, games, swimming, art and French, and by Year 3, science. This increases as pupils progress through the school so that by Year 4 all subjects are taught by specialists, which is a contributory factor in the achievement of high academic standards. Pupils' linguistic skills are enhanced by the opportunity to study Latin from Year 6. From Year 3, provision includes the setting of pupils into classes according to their ability in English and mathematics. This practice, extended to include all subjects by Year 8, enables programmes of study to be well adapted to the differing needs of the pupils. Well-planned timetabling takes into account the best time for children's learning so that literacy and numeracy almost always take place at the start of the day.
- 3.9 The physical education programme is a strength of the school, actively involving all pupils and supported by a generous time allocation and excellent facilities. The external environment is well used, particularly by Years 1 to 3, to promote learning. Pupils were observed enjoying the investigative and independent learning opportunities of the woodland learning environment.
- 3.10 Comprehensive schemes of work are in place for all subjects and regularly reviewed to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. The personal, social, health and economic education programme (PSHCE) underpins the pupils' excellent personal development. Citizenship is taught at regular intervals so that fundamental British values are explained and debated, with opportunities being given to older pupils to consider opposing views in political issues; for example, Year 6 pupils debated animatedly the moral issues involved in active participation in conflicts in other countries. In this way the school prepares pupils well for adult life in the community.
- 3.11 The school has devised a programme called *Learning2learn* which gives a strong focus to the acquisition of learning strategies, meeting the school's aim that pupils should have enquiring minds and be able to work independently. In meetings, pupils reported that this programme helps them to measure their progress and build confidence. The curriculum includes the teaching of general skills within ICT. The wider use of ICT to support learning across the curriculum is more limited because there is insufficient equipment. The school has well-advanced plans to significantly increase resources in technology in the immediate future.
- 3.12 The curriculum is well supported by an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, ranging from cookery to water polo to chamber choir. All pupils have access to this programme, which is popular with pupils and well suited to their interests because they are given opportunities to request activities; for example, a cheerleading club was recently established after consultation with older pupils. The sporting clubs are particularly popular with pupils, but opportunities to take part in non-sporting

activities are also actively promoted, such as the debating club and the more recent *Pupil Newsletter*, which develops pupils' awareness of current affairs.

- 3.13 The curriculum is further enriched by a wide and diverse programme of day and residential trips which extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. The wide range of links with the wider community, which include schools in France and India, contributes strongly to pupils' development and to their understanding of the needs of people living very different lives, sometimes in cultures very different from their own.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.14 The contribution of teaching is excellent.
- 3.15 Teaching is extremely effective in promoting pupils' progress and strongly supports the aims of the school. It is well-planned and based on an accurate understanding of pupils' needs. Teachers' knowledge is excellent; many are passionate about their subject and communicate their enthusiasm to the pupils, who respond by engaging animatedly with the learning content. Most lessons are conducted at a brisk pace which ensures focus is maintained. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are excellent; praise and constructive criticism are strong features of the teaching, which enables rapid progress because pupils feel valued and are confident to seek help when it is required. Lessons include a suitable range of teaching styles to extend the pupils' learning and to support and meet the needs of pupils with a wide range of abilities. Progress is particularly good when pupils have opportunities to work both independently and co-operatively, so that interest is maintained and understanding deepened. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils were enabled to think critically about the effect of different beliefs and cultural values on charitable institutions, presenting their research findings to the class for debate and evaluation.
- 3.16 The overall quality of marking is high. In most cases, marking adheres to the clear policy, giving constructive comments with corrections clearly indicated. In some lessons, pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own work and that of others, which helps them to analyse the precise criteria for success and take responsibility for their own learning. In a small number of cases, marking is less detailed, with ticks or congratulatory comments only and little guidance to help pupils improve their work.
- 3.17 Teaching fosters interest and independence, offering effective support to pupils with particular learning needs, for example those with SEND or EAL. Because the learning needs of pupils are well documented through formal assessments, expectations are high. The most able pupils are offered extension tasks which motivate and excite. The encouragement of independence is a strong and successful feature of much of the teaching. Most commonly, pupils are encouraged to challenge themselves to find a solution to a problem. For example, in an art lesson with Year 4, a pupil questioned the impact of oil on watercolour and was then encouraged to experiment and report the answer to the class.
- 3.18 In their response to the questionnaire, a small number of pupils stated that homework did not help them to learn. Inspection evidence from lessons confirmed that most homework tasks requested by staff consolidated the pupils' learning but did not always take account of their differing abilities so that the most able were not consistently offered suitable challenge.
- 3.19 Teaching takes account of the requirement to present a balanced presentation of opposing views in the coverage of political issues. The PSHCE programme has a

clear section on citizenship and evidence from documentation, discussion with pupils and observed lessons confirms that it is implemented correctly. For example, a Year 4 class used their literacy lesson to plan questions to take to Prime Minister's Question Time, which supported well pupils' understanding of current issues.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 The school takes active steps to ensure the personal development of the pupils. The pupils' spiritual development is excellent. Their strong self-esteem is evident in their harmonious relationships formed with older and younger children, as well as other adults, which is characterized by kind and empathetic behaviour. From a very young age, pupils confidently express their thoughts and feelings in response to stimulus from art, music and literature so that they have a well-developed appreciation of the world and can express a sense of awe and wonder. Excellent opportunities are made available for pupils to reflect upon past experiences and to grow in self-knowledge; for example, pupils in Year 2 began their day by trying to articulate their successes in the past week so that they could appreciate how much they had progressed and achieved. Through the assemblies, the PSHCE programme and lessons in religious studies, they are made aware of the Christian tradition and are able to deepen their understanding of their own faith, whilst knowing that other people have different beliefs.
- 4.3 The moral awareness of pupils is excellent. From a very young age, pupils demonstrate a clear sense of right and wrong. They show that they can think through the consequences of their actions and understand the purpose of sanctions and rewards. Systems to reward good behaviour are prized and pupils recognize that conversely there is also an appropriate penalty for unacceptable conduct. In this way they demonstrate an acceptance of responsibility for their own behaviour. They behave with kindness and respect to one another, understanding that through their actions they can choose to contribute positively to their community. This is an excellent preparation for a mature understanding of the need for a judicial system in any organized society and older pupils demonstrated that they already have an age-appropriate understanding of the civil and criminal law of England.
- 4.4 Socially, pupils develop well, showing excellent personal confidence and an ability to work harmoniously together; such skills equip them well for the future. They contribute positively to the wider community by taking on positions of responsibility such as leader of their house, sports captain or library monitor. Older pupils show initiative by leading house meetings, delivering news, sports results, and detailing personal recollections of their time in the school as they prepare to move on to senior school. The sense of belonging to a close and unified community is palpable, endorsed during meetings with pupils when they are vociferous in their enjoyment of school life. Pupils of all ages have an excellent understanding of how they can help others through a varied programme of fund-raising for a wide range of charities.
- 4.5 Pupils gain a broad knowledge of the public institutions and services of England through the comprehensive PSHCE programme. Almost all, including some younger pupils, are able to name the major political parties and talk knowledgeably about political issues because they had taken part in a mock election at the same time as the general election was held. Through active participation in the school council, they have a secure understanding of the principles of democracy.
- 4.6 The cultural awareness of pupils is excellent. Pupils understand their own cultural values and have harmonious relationships with those from backgrounds different from their own. During the week of the inspection, pupils from France were visiting

the school and fully integrated into each day as well as being given the opportunity to talk about the differences between their school and Holmwood House. An understanding of different religions is carefully promoted, as seen when pupils in Year 1 gave a confident presentation to their peers about being a Muslim and were heard with interest and respect. In these ways, diversity is celebrated. In meetings, pupils reported that they experienced no discrimination.

- 4.7 Pupils leave with an excellent standard of personal development. They are politically aware, emotionally mature, culturally developed and have a strong sense of belonging.

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

- 4.8 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.9 A nurturing atmosphere is prevalent throughout the school where care, courtesy and consideration for others is strongly promoted. In their responses to the questionnaire and in meetings, the overwhelming majority of pupils stated that they feel safe in the school and that teachers show concern for them as individuals. Because classes are small, staff know their pupils extremely well. Effective systems to identify, track and resolve pastoral concerns are firmly embedded so that pupils are offered the guidance and support to develop as rounded individuals with high self-esteem and confidence in their abilities, thereby fully meeting the school's aims.
- 4.10 The family-like atmosphere contributes strongly to pupils' confidence. Relationships are highly positive between staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves. Staff act as excellent role models so that younger pupils know how to behave from a very early age. Younger children start the day with their class teacher and say that they look forward to coming to school because everyone is shown how to be caring and kind. From Year 4, pupils are registered in mixed year groups which enables older pupils to act as mentors, thereby promoting inclusive care within their school community.
- 4.11 Pupils show an excellent understanding of the need to eat healthily and to take part in regular physical exercise. There is a wide range of healthy food on offer at all meal times and close supervision by staff ensure pupils are aware of the need to make healthy choices. Excellent opportunities, both within the curriculum and in activities after school, are offered to be physically active.
- 4.12 The school's policies to promote good behaviour and guard against harassment are highly effective, and include consideration of cyber-bullying. Behaviour is consistently excellent. Most pupils agreed that instances of bullying were rare and that if it did occur, it would be dealt with speedily. In their responses to the questionnaire, a minority of pupils stated that teachers were not always consistent in their approach to giving both rewards and sanctions. Inspectors do not agree. School records confirmed that any unacceptable behaviour is dealt with constructively and equitably in line with stated procedures.
- 4.13 The school has a suitable plan to improve educational access for pupils with SEND.
- 4.14 In their responses to the questionnaire, a small minority of pupils did not feel that the school asks for their opinions. Inspectors found that pupils have sufficient opportunities to make their views known through direct contact with teachers and senior managers and through other channels, such as the school council. In meetings, pupils confirmed these findings, stating that their views are considered; for

example, new equipment was provided for recreation time in response to discussion with class representatives at a council meeting.

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

- 4.15 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is excellent.
- 4.16 Appropriate policies are in place and carefully implemented to promote the well-being of pupils, which support well their personal development. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and all staff receive the requisite training in child protection at regular intervals. Safeguarding is a regular agenda item at meetings with the directors, as well as with staff, so all are aware of new regulations or emerging issues. All checks on staff have been carried out prior to their starting work. Minor errors in the recording of staff appointments and in the safeguarding policy were acknowledged and immediately rectified but did not compromise the safety of pupils.
- 4.17 Comprehensive documentation concerning health and safety matters are in place and all records are meticulously maintained so that pupils are cared for in a safe environment. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed by senior managers. Staff actively promote pupils' welfare in assemblies, lessons and activities; all parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that the school keeps their children safe.
- 4.18 Measures to prevent risk from fire and other hazards are highly efficient. Regular fire evacuation drills take place so that pupils are familiar with procedures. Careful risk assessments are carried out for all facilities and off-site visits. Provision for sick pupils and those with SEND is well managed and a good number of staff have received appropriate training.
- 4.19 The school has complied with the requirement from the previous inspection in 2010 to ensure that admission registers are backed up monthly. These, together with attendance records, are now maintained and stored correctly, as required, for three years.

4.(d) The quality of boarding

- 4.20 The quality of boarding is excellent.
- 4.21 Outcomes for boarders are excellent. Boarders greatly enjoy their boarding experiences and in turn these support their personal development extremely well. Boarding staff work hard to create a homely and welcoming environment, thus fully meeting their aims. In their response to the questionnaire, all parents stated that their children enjoyed boarding. This was confirmed by boarders, particularly in meetings, almost all of whom relished the experience and felt that it had made them more confident, self-reliant and tolerant of others.
- 4.22 Although numbers of pupils boarding vary, the family-like atmosphere is strong, because boarders have pleasant and constructive relationships with one another and with the staff. A recommendation from the 2013 intermediate inspection was that boarders should be made aware of outcomes of any views expressed by them with regard to boarding provision. Good progress has been made because boarders can put suggestions in a conveniently placed box and any outcomes are then posted on house noticeboards. Additionally boarders regularly complete an anonymous questionnaire in which they are asked to identify any areas of concern requiring

school action to effect improvement. In these ways, boarders are actively encouraged to contribute their views to the operation of boarding provision.

- 4.23 In meetings with pupils and because of the support information on the house noticeboards, it is clear that boarders have a range of people to turn to if they have a concern and are confident that help will be available. This includes a counsellor, an independent listener and contact details for external agencies.
- 4.24 The school successfully implements and evaluates policies to promote good behaviour and guard against bullying, including cyber-bullying. Boarders report that any such incidents are extremely rare because they understand that the expectation is to be well behaved and responsive to the needs of others. Because of this, boarders, some of whom board infrequently, are happy and settled.
- 4.25 The quality of boarding provision and care is excellent. All parents who responded to the questionnaire indicated that the school keeps their child safe and that the experience is enjoyable. Comprehensive induction procedures, coupled with a warm welcome from staff and other boarders, ensure that any pupil new to boarding settles quickly. This was confirmed during a house assembly, when boarders in Year 8 spoke warmly of their memories of boarding and how kind and welcoming everyone was.
- 4.26 The school has appropriate medical policies which are carefully implemented if boarders are unwell. Almost all boarders felt that they are well looked after if they are ill or injured. Experienced and well qualified medical staff oversee boarders' welfare, well supported by a good number of staff also trained in first aid. Medication is safely stored and administered and records are scrupulously maintained. Accommodation for boarders who are unwell meets the requirements but is rarely used because most pupils live near the school and are able to go home.
- 4.27 The school has comprehensive documentation to ensure the welfare, health and safety of boarders. Accommodation is secure and well maintained. Some areas have been recently updated, such as the recreation area, which is bright and welcoming and enhances provision. Good progress has been made in meeting the recommendation from the previous inspection in 2013 that boarders should be encouraged to personalise their accommodation. Boarders are able to bring personal items such as duvet covers or soft toys which help to make the bedrooms feel homely.
- 4.28 Regular fire drills are held at appropriate intervals and all checks of equipment are meticulous. All boarders, including those with specific dietary needs, are provided with meals which are nutritious and plentiful in quantity and variety. Almost all boarders liked the food offered, particularly the menus on theme nights such as Greek night. A small minority stated in the questionnaire that they were unhappy with the availability of snacks and drinks outside meal times. Inspection evidence did not agree. Appropriate snacks and drinks are readily available during the day and in the evening before bed-time. Good arrangements are in place to provide clean laundry, should this be required, although most is taken home. Boarders are able to obtain stationery whilst accommodated at school, although most prefer to use their own. Valuable items are handed to boarding staff for safekeeping.
- 4.29 Activities during the evening are a real strength of boarding provision, being varied, regularly changed and carefully tailored to the expressed needs and interests of the boarders. In meetings, boarders were unequivocally enthusiastic, stating that the opportunity to participate was a major factor in their decision to board. Excellent use

is made of the external environment to explore, investigate and simply enjoy being outdoors with friends.

- 4.30 Boarders can contact their parents either by using a mobile telephone or by using the house telephone. Boarding staff maintain regular contact with parents, who report that their response to any concerns is swift and helpful.
- 4.31 Arrangements for boarders' welfare and safeguarding are excellent. All policies meet current requirements, are well known to staff and carefully implemented. Risk assessments are thorough. All staff receive regular training in safeguarding procedures and are fully aware of their responsibilities to promote well-being and report any concerns.
- 4.32 All boarding staff have job descriptions which reflect their duties and receive a careful induction process. Opportunities to receive further training in boarding are readily available and an appraisal programme is securely embedded so that staff receive regular reviews of their boarding practice. A suitable number of appropriately qualified staff care for boarders. Staff know where boarders should be at all times and what to do should a boarder be missing. There is always an appropriately-experienced adult member of staff sleeping in the boarding house. Boarders know who to contact if they are unwell during the night and junior members of staff understand the school's requirement to consult the senior member of staff on duty, should they be required to deal with anything more than minor issues. Accommodation for staff is suitably separate from boarders; there is no one living in boarding accommodation who is not employed by the school. Access to boarding accommodation is strictly controlled.
- 4.33 The effectiveness of the leadership and management of boarding is excellent, and has a significant positive impact upon the quality of care and provision. Clear information about boarding principles and practice is readily available through the comprehensive information in handbooks, the school's website and regular communication with boarding staff. In partnership with all involved staff, senior leaders review policies and procedures and monitor provision. Directors have not always been sufficiently familiar with the changing standards for boarding. The link between senior management and directors is being strengthened following the appointment of an advisory group and plans to increase the effectiveness of the directors' duty to oversee boarding have already been agreed.
- 4.34 The boarding house runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Because staff involved in leadership and management are highly committed to meeting the needs of boarders, their experience is happy and greatly appreciated by parents.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is excellent.
- 5.2 The directors are strongly committed to fulfilling the aims of the school. They bring a very wide range of appropriate experience in finance and business to their role. As a result, they discharge their responsibilities for standards, financial planning and investment in staffing and learning resources. The recently appointed advisory team of three members, whose expertise is primarily in education and property, has significantly strengthened governance so that oversight of accommodation and educational standards is clear and rigorous.
- 5.3 The directors have a good insight into the working of the school. Contact between directors, advisors and senior managers is frequent, offering those responsible for its governance ample opportunities to give suitable challenge and support for the school. The head provides detailed information about educational initiatives and any matters of concern. The directors are generally well-informed about the day-to-day working of the school and are able to make relevant strategic decisions about future development initiatives. Minutes of meetings are detailed and demonstrate that key issues are analysed and debated carefully. Oversight of boarding has been less thorough; directors have not always had a sufficiently timely understanding of the changing requirements in this area. They have recognised that this is an area for attention and have made suitable arrangements to remedy this.
- 5.4 The directors are effective in discharging their responsibilities for child protection, welfare and health and safety throughout the school. The annual review of safeguarding arrangements is carried out as required. Scrutiny from advisors ensures that safeguarding and educational practices are effective. The school has responded well to the findings and recommendations of the previous inspections in 2010 and 2013; all matters raised have been put into practice.

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

- 5.5 The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians, is excellent.
- 5.6 Strong educational direction from senior managers has ensured that the school is highly successful in fulfilling its aims to develop the individual potential of each child through the provision of a rich and balanced curriculum. Careful oversight of all policies and their effective implementation ensures that pupils thrive within a caring environment. Senior managers make sure that values which encourage respect for others and an understanding of the democratic process are at the heart of the learning programme. At all levels, the school is well led and managed. Clear job descriptions ensure that staff understand their particular responsibilities and discharge them conscientiously so that the care of pupils, particularly with regard to safeguarding, is given a high priority.
- 5.7 The senior leadership team has a clear understanding of the strengths and needs of the school. Heads of departments work closely with managers responsible for pastoral care and are strongly focused on how the school can improve and develop.

The comprehensive school development plan is backed by subject plans so that staff are involved at every stage of the process, spending time in self-evaluation before planning for future development. New initiatives are successfully introduced and their success evaluated and consolidated. For example, *The Five Rs*, which focus on teaching pupils how to learn, rather than simply acquiring a body of knowledge, are understood by all so that they are an embedded part of the learning process and feature strongly in all curriculum planning.

- 5.8 The school has responded positively to the recommendation from the previous inspection to improve the rigour of monitoring by senior managers and department heads to ensure best practice in teaching and learning. The appraisal programme is firmly embedded so that all staff are observed teaching by senior managers at least annually and more regularly by heads of departments. This has had a positive impact upon the quality of teaching, which is now of a consistently high standard. Staff are encouraged to observe their peers informally but to date, few have done so.
- 5.9 Management is highly successful in recruiting and retaining suitable staff. The teaching staff are wholly committed to the school. They feel strongly supported in their professional development and work as a united team so that pupils are well supported in their personal development within a stable and cohesive community. The high level of support for the school is evident in the response from parents to the questionnaire, with the overwhelming majority believing that the school is well led and managed and with no areas where significant numbers of parents expressed any concerns.
- 5.10 A comprehensive induction programme is in place for new staff. Suitable arrangements ensure that all required checks are carried out before staff start work. Isolated omissions in the recording of checks were rectified by the end of the inspection. Safeguarding is a priority and so all staff, including maintenance, domestic and administrative employees, receive appropriate and regular training in child protection and welfare, health and safety.
- 5.11 In their response to the questionnaire, parents were overwhelmingly satisfied with the education and care provided for their children. They also expressed their general satisfaction with the range of subjects and activities offered and with the overall care of their children, which ensured their safety and well-being. Almost all would strongly recommend the school to others and were highly satisfied with the information they receive about the school and its policies. Inspection evidence found that communication is highly effective between home and school, facilitated by electronic information via text and email. In their responses to the questionnaire and in informal discussion with some parents, they expressed their appreciation of the staff's availability for discussion about any concerns, which are handled with care and in accordance with the school's policy.
- 5.12 Parents have many opportunities to be involved in the life of the school. Parents can be elected as representatives for their Year and in this role meet with the headmaster three times a year. They report that the school welcomes their positive feedback and suggestions. All parents are welcomed in some assemblies, all concerts and at matches. On joining the school, they are invited to be part of the parents' association and can take part in by a wide range of social and fund-raising activities which provide additional resources. Recent contributions have included the creation of a wildlife garden, a galleon in the Reception garden, and the

refurbishment of the boarding activities area in the cellars. These measures support well the strong community feeling within the school.

- 5.13 Parents of current and prospective pupils are provided with a wide variety of information about the school through the weekly newsletter and the annual magazine, both of which celebrate all aspects of the children's achievements. The regularly updated website is easy to navigate and includes a parents' portal so that they are given ready access to their child's school experience and all required information about the school and its workings.
- 5.14 Parents receive detailed reports about academic progress at frequent intervals. These give clear information about work and progress and include helpful targets so that parents can support their child's learning.

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) How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend

- 6.1 The provision is outstanding in meeting the needs of the range of children who attend. Carefully documented programmes provide rich opportunities to explore, investigate and learn so that children have an excellent beginning to their education. Skilful planning covers all areas of learning and is carefully matched to children's stage of development so that they are well supported to reach their potential. As a result, almost all meet, and most exceed, the level of development typical for their age. Individual progress is carefully documented so that it can be assessed against typical developmental milestones. Younger children and babies are encouraged to listen and focus so that they begin to concentrate and communicate well; for example, a very young child was praised for saying the word 'tractor' and then shown the trailer to further extend vocabulary. Older children use their imaginations, speak fluently and develop their physical skills, as seen when they made a den and then discussed what they might need to survive here. By the time they move on from the nursery into Reception and then into the main school, they are well prepared for the next stage in their learning so that standards of literacy and numeracy are high. Careful adaptations to activities ensure that activities are sufficiently stimulating to meet the needs of the most able. Children with SEND or EAL are speedily identified and offered strong support so that they make steady progress; for example, labels in two languages can be seen on doors and washrooms so that children who have recently arrived in this country and do not yet speak English well are helped to feel at home because they are surrounded by familiar language.
- 6.2 Staff are enthusiastic and have a clear understanding of how children learn effectively. They set high expectations and work hard to provide a stimulating and challenging environment, so that children are engaged and motivated. Thorough assessments are well used to provide challenging activities, which are then carefully recorded in an individual *Learning Journey* book and shared with parents, who can also make contributions. In nursery, a daily record is kept of significant goals being reached. In this way, progress is carefully monitored and enhanced by close communication between home and school.
- 6.3 Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the care and learning provision for their children. They talk positively about the warm and caring atmosphere and feel well informed about what their children are doing and how much progress is being made.

6.(b) The contribution of the early years provision to children's well-being

- 6.4 The contribution of the early years provision to children's well-being is outstanding. Staff ensure that all children form strong bonds with their special person so that they feel happy and secure. Staff know each child in their personal care very well. Through observation and discussion with parents, they respond sensitively to their needs, offering comfort or stimulus as appropriate. Children enjoy the wide range of facilities. Behaviour, especially of the youngest, is outstanding. In the room for the youngest children, the atmosphere is calm and cosy and resources are plentiful. Their key adult takes careful notice when their interest wanes so that the stimulus

can be changed. In the rooms for older children, purposeful and co-operative play is encouraged, as seen when they joined together to water their herb garden because they knew that if they did not do so, the plants would die. By the time they reach Reception, their behaviour is exemplary, evident in their politeness during meal time when they used cutlery adeptly and requested additional vegetables politely.

- 6.5 Children are highly confident learners. They are able to play independently and with a clear intention. Staff make maximum use of the external environment which significantly contributes to the development of investigative and imaginative skills. Children talk about their ideas to one another and to staff. They are helped to develop an early sense of right and wrong through discussion; for example, when listening to stories with a strong moral theme.
- 6.6 Children know that good food will help them grow strong. In Reception, they talked knowledgeably about the need to eat a daily variety of fruit and vegetable and used this understanding to make healthy drinks. They are keen to exercise and love to climb and run. Older children are fully independent in managing their own hygiene and the younger ones are helped towards independence.
- 6.7 Excellent arrangements are in place to ensure smooth transitions between every stage. The systematic approach involves a careful handover of information by staff and visits by children to their next classroom to meet the new adults who will be caring for them. Importance is placed on including parents also, so that they are able to meet new staff and receive detailed information about routines and care practice. In this way, the school ensures that each change is a smooth and happy experience.

6.(c) The leadership and management of the early years provision

- 6.8 Leadership and management of the early years are outstanding. The board of directors is well informed through the appointment of an advisor who reports frequently on standards of provision and care. Staff work closely with senior leaders so that oversight of all matters, including regulatory compliance and educational programmes, is thorough, making a significant contribution to the overall high standards. Comprehensive self-evaluation is in place so that the development plan is detailed and sets challenging targets for on-going improvement.
- 6.9 Safeguarding policies and procedures are secure and comply with relevant guidance. All staff receive appropriate training, renewed at regular intervals. By the end of the inspection, minor omissions when recording appointment checks were corrected. Recently appointed staff receive a careful induction so that they understand key policies. Staff discuss their professional development regularly and are offered appropriate additional training. The recommendation from the previous inspection in 2013 that opportunities should be provided for regular meetings between all EYFS lead staff has been fully met. Meetings between key staff are regular and include senior leaders as well as the advisor to the board, with the outcome that expertise and experiences are shared so that children are given a uniform experience at each stage of their development. Staff work as one team, providing a stable environment which is welcoming, safe and stimulating.
- 6.10 When a concern is raised about a child's development, staff build on their excellent relationships with parents and talk sensitively to them about any extra support that their child may need, including, if necessary, from external agencies.

6.(d) The overall quality and standards of the early years provision

- 6.11 The overall quality and standards of the early years provision is outstanding. Assessment results are carefully collated and show that most children make good progress in relation to their starting points. The few children whose skills are less well developed are identified early so that help and support can be offered to both child and parent. In nursery, most children happily count to 20 and use simple phrases in French. By the end of EYFS, they are highly articulate and have made excellent progress in numeracy and literacy. They can double numbers to ten and have a good understanding and use the vocabulary of capacity. They make rapid progress with phonics and most can read simple books. Their knowledge is apparent in their ability to write simple stories independently. All children, including those with SEND or EAL and the most able are given tasks that offer appropriate challenge.
- 6.12 Children's personal and emotional development is outstanding because they are happy and feel safe and secure. Excellent relationships between and with staff give children a sense of personal worth and the confidence to explore, investigate and be adventurous and creative. All requirements for safeguarding and welfare have been met. Leadership and management are effective in evaluating practice, sharing ideas and expertise and effecting improvements where necessary. Performance management arrangements are effective and have a positive impact on teaching and learning. Children thrive in this warm and caring environment.

Compliance with statutory requirements for children under three

- 6.13 The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 and no action is required.