



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Birkenhead School

December 2021

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School's Details

School	Birkenhead School			
DfE number	344/6023			
Early Years registration number	EY320318			
Registered charity number	1093419			
Address	Birkenhead School The Lodge 58 Beresford Road Oxton, Wirral CH43 2JD			
Telephone number	0151 6524014			
Email address	enquire@birkenheadschool.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Paul Vicars			
Chair of governors	Mr Andrew Cross			
Age range	3 months to 18 years			
Number of pupils on roll	944			
	EYFS	111	Prep	328
	Seniors	394	Sixth Form	111
Inspection dates	30 November to 3 December 2021			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Birkenhead School is an independent co-educational day school which was established in 1860 as a school for male pupils and became fully co-educational in 2008. The school has strong links to the Church of England although there is a wide range of faiths and nationalities within the community. The school has three sections: the Nursery and Pre-prep, which takes children from three months to three years; the Prep which includes the Reception class and Years 1 to 6; and Seniors for Years 7 to 13.
- 1.2 The school is a charitable company limited by guarantee and overseen by a board of governors who are also trustees.
- 1.3 During the period March to August 2020, the Nursery and Pre-prep remained open. The rest of the school remained open only for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.
- 1.4 During this period of partial closure the school provided remote learning materials for all pupils.
- 1.5 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.6 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.7 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021, the Nursery and Pre-prep remained open. The rest of the school remained open to vulnerable children and the children of key workers.
- 1.8 In 2020 and 2021 public examinations were not held. For pupils who would have been expected to take these examinations, centre-assessed grades and teacher-assessed grades were awarded.
- 1.9 Since 2020, EYFS profiles have not been externally moderated.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.10 Birkenhead School seeks to provide an open and happy community in which endeavour and achievement flourish. It aims to enable pupils to realise their potential and develop a love of learning. It strives to prepare them for later life within a caring and structured environment in which pupils grow in self-confidence, enjoying a wealth of opportunities for teamwork and personal development both inside and outside of the classroom.

About the pupils

- 1.11 Pupils come from a range of backgrounds and ethnicities, across the whole of Wirral, Cheshire, the wider Merseyside area and North Wales. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicates that the ability of the pupils in the prep is above average, and broadly average in the Seniors, but with some above and some below. The school's assessment identifies 107 pupils as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), including dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, Irlen's syndrome and a range of other needs, and of these 59 receive additional support for their needs. There are 11 pupils with an education, health and care plan. There are 12 pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) of whom 4 receive additional support. The school does not identify pupils who are more able but offers opportunities to stretch and challenge those who have particular talents.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

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 specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 In the prep school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2018 to 2021, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2018 to 2021 have confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.5 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.6 Pupils receive relationships education in the prep school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.7 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.8 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.9 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.10 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.11 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.12 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.13 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.14 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.15 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.16 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website
- 2.17 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.18 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.
- 2.19 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.20 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.
- 2.21 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

The quality and standards of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision

- 2.22 The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.
- 2.23 The setting meets the needs of all the children including those with SEND extremely well. Children are very happy and thrive in the caring and supportive setting. Staff give quality time to each child to ensure they feel secure so that they benefit from all the activities on offer.
- 2.24 The indoor environment for children is clean, well-organised and stimulating. Children are given the time they need to develop and to explore the space. Staff arrange activities to encourage the physical development of babies and toddlers, making excellent use of the outside areas to promote this.
- 2.25 There is a shared understanding of the responsibility for safeguarding to ensure that every child is safe in the setting. All requirements for safeguarding and welfare of the setting are being met.
- 2.26 The highly supportive leadership team works closely with staff to ensure that evaluative practice and a commitment to continual improvement has a positive impact on the quality of the children's learning and development.

Quality of education

- 2.27 The quality of education is outstanding.
- 2.28 The educational programme provides excellent opportunities for children to increase their communication and language skills, as well as their physical development, through well-planned activities. Their personal, social and emotional development is also very well supported by the effective care practices. Staff have very regular opportunities to share information about each child's progress, particular interests and challenges. Staff use this information to plan bespoke activities to support children's progress.
- 2.29 Staff show that they have a very good understanding of how children learn at this age and know what each child might achieve in relation to their age and stage of development. Well-planned activities enable all children to explore and become inquisitive and imaginative learners. Children are given many opportunities to play with different toys and equipment promoting independence, creativity and an ability to focus their attention on activities.
- 2.30 Staff readily engage with children during routine activities and take every opportunity to develop language and social skills, asking questions about the stories they are reading and encouraging them to join in with actions and sounds.
- 2.31 Regular assessments contribute to the staff's knowledge about what each child can do, which helps identify the next steps in their learning. These assessments are shared with parents. Children's achievements at home are celebrated and feed into reviews of children's progress so that nothing is missed. Staff identify children who may be falling behind so that activities can be tailored to support them appropriately. The wide-ranging experiences that children receive prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

Behaviour and attitudes

- 2.32 Behaviour and attitudes are outstanding.
- 2.33 The setting is calm and orderly. Staff speak quietly with children, which encourages them to be calm in turn. Children are very keen and enthusiastic learners, who are eager to explore their surroundings and use their imaginations. They are able to maintain their focus on activities for appropriate periods of time. A toddler was very engaged in an activity to post shapes into a box and enjoyed being given a greater assortment of shapes to explore. Children are willing to try new things and to persevere. For

example, a toddler was observed trying to learn to ride a trike, falling off several times before eventually managing to stay on and move around. Children can use spoons to feed themselves and some are able to find their own cups, showing that they are developing independence.

- 2.34 Staff give appropriate praise to children for their achievements. This encourages children to repeat their activities, to embed learning and to try new things. Staff introduce new ideas and equipment when appropriate to extend opportunities for children, such as adding farm vehicles to an activity so that children can develop and expand their vocabulary.
- 2.35 Children demonstrate excellent behaviour and show great respect for one another, often helping each other to fetch things or joining in applause to celebrate each other's successes. This is very well supported by the modelling of kind and supportive behaviour by staff. Staff gently remind children about how to share things as they begin to learn how to play together.
- 2.36 Attendance is monitored well. Children are happy to be greeted by their key person each morning. Procedures are in place to investigate unexpected absences.

Personal development

- 2.37 The personal development of children is outstanding.
- 2.38 Highly effective care practices promote and support the children's emotional security and development of their character so that children feel happy and safe in the setting and can therefore take advantage of everything that is on offer. Committed staff reassure and respond very effectively to each child's needs in a sensitive and caring way. For example, a baby who was upset on arrival at the setting was comforted and reassured by staff until he felt sufficiently secure to join in with the activities. Parents typically commented to inspectors that they are very impressed with the standard of emotional support given to their child and that they are confident that the setting will look after their child in the very best way.
- 2.39 Staff have an excellent understanding of how to support children's confidence and independence. Time is given for children to explore and persevere with their interests. For example, children were observed playing in the sandpit with staff describing to them what they were doing, in order that children would hear language that was specific to the task that they were undertaking. All children, except the very youngest, feed themselves and they are able to locate their sleeping mats. They know this daily routine well, which demonstrates a growing sense of independence.
- 2.40 Staff encourage children to take risks and challenge themselves both inside and outdoors, such as when using wheeled toys or climbing to the top of the slide. These activities are carefully supervised so that children are not put in danger or set a task that is so challenging that they lose confidence.
- 2.41 Staff know each child very well, particularly through the highly supportive key person system. This helps children feel confident with the adults in the setting, which helps children to feel safe, happy, and secure. This helps to foster their well-being and independence very effectively. Children know that they can seek assurance from their key worker at any time.
- 2.42 The setting makes excellent provision to encourage children to lead a healthy lifestyle. Children have regular access to the outdoor learning areas and to the wider school grounds for exercise, allowing them to be physically active and to develop their gross motor skills. They are provided with nutritionally balanced snacks and lunches and have access to water whenever it is wanted.
- 2.43 The children's access to the internet is very limited in order to minimise screen time. However, when used, it is always supervised by staff to ensure children are kept safe. Staff encourage and support children to be aware of wider risks, such as ascending the steps of the climbing frame.
- 2.44 Thorough hygiene practices, which are carefully followed by everyone, ensure that the personal needs of each child are appropriately met. Staff remind children to wash their hands before eating and support those who are unable to do so independently.

- 2.45 All staff are aware of their responsibilities for the consistent implementation of policies and procedures towards safeguarding, welfare, learning and development. All statutory requirements are fully met and adhered to in a consistent manner.
- 2.46 The setting prepares the children for life in modern Britain. Good manners are encouraged, and the children are often reminded of the motto 'kind hands, kind hearts and kind words', in order that they can begin to think of others. Children take part in charity days and celebrate cultural events. However, children are not always provided with opportunities to develop their understanding of diversity through their play or in discussions, as appropriate resources are not always readily available to them.

Leadership and management

- 2.47 Leadership and management are outstanding.
- 2.48 Leaders are continually looking for ways to improve the provision to ensure each child is given the best start to their education. Leaders have identified areas for future development such as further harnessing the use of outside areas for learning. Leaders monitor standards of personal care and the delivery of the curriculum in a consistent manner to ensure high quality outcomes. Leaders have acted on the recommendation from the previous inspection report and have introduced a new tracking system so that age-related expectations are now more consistently used in observations and assessments. Leaders show that they have a very clear understanding about how to support children under two years of age so that they achieve the best outcomes.
- 2.49 Leaders pay particular attention to the professional development of the staff. Effective systems are in place for both supervisions and appraisals which enable staff to discuss issues and identify training which benefits both the individual and the setting. Staff appreciate that they can seek support from the leadership team at any time. Leaders are mindful of the workload of staff. Staff are encouraged to discuss their personal career development and to identify training opportunities.
- 2.50 Relationships between leaders and children, parents and the wider community are very productive. Parents spoke of the friendly and approachable staff who know their children very well and of the consistently high standards of care provided. Parents particularly value the conversations they have with staff at the end of the day, when they are informed about what their child has done during the session. The setting has very good links with outside agencies through the Local Authority's Early Years Intervention Team and can access specialist help such as physiotherapy, if required.
- 2.51 The governing body are fully aware of the requirements of the EYFS and oversee and support the leaders very well. Leaders fulfil their statutory duties with regard to equality, safeguarding and safer recruitment.

Compliance with statutory requirements

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

Recommendation for further improvement

The school is advised to make the following improvement to its provision for children in the early years.

- Increase the opportunities to promote diversity in children's play and discussion.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- Throughout the school pupils achieve highly in both academic and other areas.
 - Pupils are hardworking and resilient; they have extremely positive attitudes to learning and are able to work both collaboratively and independently.
 - Pupils have excellent communication skills; they are highly articulate and confident speakers and listen and respond maturely.
 - Pupils develop excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum, but they are not routinely given opportunities to take leadership of their learning.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school community, by fulfilling roles of responsibility, and to the wider community through charitable volunteering and involvement.
 - Pupils' social development is excellent and relationships between pupils are warm and positive.
 - Pupils' moral understanding is highly developed, and they show an empathetic understanding of and respect for other cultures
 - Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate a high level of self-understanding, self-confidence, self-discipline and resilience.
 - Pupils know how to stay safe and healthy, both physically and mentally, and are supported in this by the excellent pastoral system.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school may wish to consider making the following improvement:
- Ensure that pupils of all ages and abilities achieve high levels of independence in their learning through the provision of greater opportunities to develop their higher order thinking skills.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils achieve highly across the wide range of academic and extra-curricular opportunities available to them. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) make excellent progress in relation to

their age and development, so that by the end of Reception, the majority are attaining well above national age-related expectations. Achievement in public examinations has been consistently high for the last three years. In 2019 well over half of GCSE examinations sat were awarded top grades, with nearly half of A-level examinations graded A or A*. Centre-assessed grades in 2020 and teacher-assessed grades in 2021 maintained the upward trend of recent years. Pupils with SEND and those for whom English is an additional language make equally good progress. They are aided in their learning by specialist support if needed which ensures that pupils understand how to structure their own learning and so fulfil their potential. Many of the sixth form study for the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and in the last three years nearly all obtained the highest grade. Most pupils proceed to university, with many gaining places at universities with very selective entry requirements.

- 3.6 Data provided by the school shows that, overall, pupils make excellent progress from entry to A-level. This correlates with the excellent progress seen during lessons; for example, in a sixth-form physics lesson pupils swiftly assimilated the concept of fission and were able to explain how the moderator and coolant work in a nuclear reactor, while in a music lesson younger pupils showed an excellent understanding of musical structure and could reproduce chords on their ukuleles. Pupils are aided in their learning by well-planned teaching, which encompasses a variety of techniques and is tailored to the needs of the pupils. The most able pupils are provided with suitable challenge via a range of academic clubs and societies, although challenge is less prevalent in lessons where learning can be overly teacher led. As a result, progress in some lessons is not as rapid as it could be, and pupils do not develop their higher-order thinking skills as fully as they might. Pupils' progress during the most recent COVID-19 restrictions has been extremely good due to the excellence of the school's provision for remote learning. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, most parents agreed that the school benefits from strong governance, leadership and management which contributes to the success of the pupils by creating an ethos which supports and encourages pupils and staff in the pursuit of excellence. Most parents commented that they are very pleased with the range of subjects and extra-curricular activities provided and agreed that the school and teaching enable pupils to learn and make good progress. Most pupils agree that teachers are supportive and help them learn.
- 3.7 Pupils' excellent knowledge, skills and understanding are reflected in their achievements across the curriculum. In the EYFS children make excellent progress in blending letters to form simple words and are able to apply these in sentences. Pupils show a good understanding of their previous learning and are encouraged to apply this knowledge to new situations. In the prep school pupils developed their basketball shooting skills quickly as they built upon previous learning, while in a sixth-form art lesson pupils expertly created clay busts taking the story of Medusa as their inspiration. The rate of pupils' progress is enhanced throughout the school by tracking and monitoring systems that enable teachers to tailor teaching and tasks to individual needs. Most pupils say they value the support and encouragement given by their teachers and believe this helps them to become better learners and know how to improve in their work.
- 3.8 Pupils have excellent communication skills. They read well and are assisted in this by regular library lessons during which they are encouraged to read fiction. Pupils are confident and articulate speakers, listen well and write fluently in a range of styles. Reception children have a good understanding of the sounds letters make and their writing and speaking skills develop rapidly as they grow in confidence and maturity. As they progress through the school, pupils write with increasing fluency and sophistication. Younger prep pupils display very good extended writing skills with excellent use of adjectives, while older pupils demonstrated their ability to write for different purposes including writing letters, biographies and non-chronological reports. Sixth-form pupils demonstrated an excellent command of literary devices when analysing a Latin text or when discussing TS Eliot's use of characterisation. Pupils enjoy debating at school and participate successfully in regional and national debating competitions. Pupils use technical language fluently in all subjects, as was observed in a sixth-form business studies lesson where pupils could select and use correct terms to explain the advantages and disadvantages of succession planning.

- 3.9 Pupils are very competent mathematicians. Children in the EYFS can count with confidence beyond 10 and can add and subtract and recognise written numbers. Pre-prep pupils could use a number line effectively to add and subtract, while prep pupils apply their previous knowledge to complex problem-solving involving angles. In a sixth-form further mathematics lesson, pupils were able to very accurately and swiftly apply their understanding of exponential modelling when calculating the rate of depreciation of a car. Pupils benefit from an appropriately high degree of challenge in the majority of teaching which stretches and develops their mathematical thinking. However, in some lessons tightly controlled teacher led activities limited the rate of progress for some. More able mathematicians compete with success in national mathematics and science competitions. Pupils are comfortable using their skills across a wide range of other subjects. For example, sixth form chemists handled complex equations with ease while pupils studying GCSE physical education (P) could draw accurate graphs showing the rate of acceleration of long jumpers on their run up.
- 3.10 Pupils of all ages competently use a broad range of Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills. For instance, Pre-prep pupils could confidently use a data handling programme to design a zoo, while older pupils showed complete command of a programme while designing a badge for the school ski trip. There is some use of ICT in other subjects such as GSCE pupils employing a sophisticated programme to develop their biomimicry projects, while in a music lesson sixth formers made excellent use of a specialist programme to investigate cadence progression and apply it to their own compositions.
- 3.11 The development of pupils' study skills is variable throughout the school. In most teaching, well chosen, challenging tasks and probing questions, informed by strong subject knowledge, encourages pupils to think deeply about issues. For example, young prep school pupils successfully gathered information from a range of sources in their study of the solar system. Older pupils showed an excellent understanding of characterisation in their study of *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* and sixth form pupils exhibited advanced skills of analysis when studying a passage of Virgil's *Aeneid*. However, work is often too closely directed either by the teacher or through reliance upon insufficiently challenging worksheets and this restricts pupils' opportunities to take leadership of their learning and to develop their higher order thinking skills including research, reasoning, and analysing data.
- 3.12 Pupils achieve highly in a range of creative and physical pursuits and are supported in their achievements by the wide-ranging extra-curricular programme. Musical groups perform at a high level both within school and beyond, most notably in the Chapel Choir. Pupils are successful in individual external music examinations, including winning places in national youth choirs and orchestras. Many pupils enjoy considerable success in speech and drama exams and in school plays. Imaginative and creative art and photography is displayed throughout the school. School sports teams of all ages are highly successful in a wide range of local and national competitions, and exceptionally talented pupils represent national, regional and county teams in a range of sports, including hockey, rugby and netball. Pupils enjoy participating in the gold CREST award and have enjoyed much success in recent years. Pupils successfully complete The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme at bronze, silver and gold levels.
- 3.13 Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They are enthusiastic and ambitious learners, with a tangible desire to succeed. Children in the early years display excellent listening skills and patiently take turns at answering questions. In a maths lesson young senior school pupils were fully focused and worked well with their group to extend their knowledge of number pyramids. Pupils challenge each other's ideas in a constructive way, whilst being highly supportive and respectful of each other's views. This was seen throughout the school with children in the Reception year eager to put forward their ideas and to listen to the ideas of others. In drama rehearsal pupils were highly supportive of each other and very respectful when watching others work. The majority of work is neatly presented and kept in a very orderly manner, clearly labelled and divided into different sections of the syllabus.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 Pupils demonstrate high levels of confidence, self-discipline and resilience. Teaching supports pupils' personal development extremely well through the excellent pastoral care systems that operate throughout the school. This is recognised by parents, most of whom agreed in the questionnaires that the school helps their children to be confident and independent. From EYFS onwards children are encouraged to be resilient in their learning as they are guided through increasingly challenging curricular and extra-curricular activities. The school's ethos of encouragement and praise enables pupils to have the confidence to try something without fear of failure because making errors is seen as part of the learning process. All pupils have an excellent understanding of how to improve their own learning, and are aided in this by teachers who support pupils and agree targets for academic progress and self-management. The school shares assessment data and predicted grades with pupils who then assess their own performance and identify areas where they can improve.
- 3.16 Pupils of all ages make sensible and thoughtful decisions and appreciate how these decisions can affect their futures. The youngest pupils decide what direction their learning and play will take by following their imagination and curiosity in selecting their own choice of activity and resource, such as when children in the early years selected the stencil they wanted to draw round and decorate. As they grow through the school, pupils' decision-making skills develop in an age-appropriate way as they select for themselves which activities or subject clinics to attend, which subjects to study and possible career paths.
- 3.17 Pupils develop good spiritual awareness as they move through the school. They are supported in their spiritual development by a strong religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, and regular assemblies. The Chapel choir sings Evensong every Sunday in term time and pupils say that listening to them sing provides 'goosebumps' moments. There are regular prayer meetings led by the school chaplain and pupils discuss maturely and with perception philosophical ideas such as hope. In a prep school assembly pupils listened respectfully to a reading from the bible about the nativity and all joined in the school prayer. Pupils have a good knowledge of the world's major religions and consider philosophical and ethical concepts, such as when pupils studying for GCSEs discussed with deep understanding the importance of the Eucharist to the Christian faith and the schisms that result from different views. Pupils of all ages demonstrate an appreciation of non-material things such as young prep school pupils describing that what they valued most at Christmas was being with family. Pupils deepen their appreciation of the non-material from the inspiring artwork around school, and the frequent musical concerts, and drama productions. From an early age pupils demonstrate a mature understanding of the value of looking after their environment, with children in the early years appreciating their woodland areas, and older pupils keen to reduce waste in school and increase recycling.
- 3.18 Pupils are highly self-disciplined, and their personal development is characterised by excellent standards of behaviour and respect, both for each other and for staff. Pupils say that there are very few relationship issues between pupils, but when they do arise the school's effective support systems help them to resolve them. Pupils develop strong relationships derived from the ethos of the school which is based on mutual respect, and this is demonstrated in the relationships observed between pupils of different ages, as seen in chess club where sixth formers patiently explained the rules to younger pupils. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong and take responsibility for their own behaviour. Almost all pupils and most parents agreed that the school actively promotes and expects good behaviour. Pupils are polite and well-mannered; they support and understand the school rules and are supported in this by the clear behaviour policy which is implemented consistently. The development of their moral values begins in the Nursery where children learn to understand school and class rules, share, take turns and are polite to staff and each other. Moral issues are considered intelligently. For example when junior pupils discussed the subject of peer pressure and the importance of resisting attempts to lead them astray.

- 3.19 Pupils enjoy taking on roles and responsibilities and make a very positive contribution to the school community in doing so. From the youngest age, the children respond well when encouraged to think of others. Pupils enjoy the responsibility of contributing to the school council to influence their and other pupils' lives in school. They willingly volunteer for a wide range of practical roles within the school, including prefects, mentors of younger pupils, co-ordinators for charity work, and sports captains. Sports Leaders develop strong leadership skills devising and leading movement activities for Reception-aged children. Pupils show a mature understanding of how they can help those less fortunate than themselves. For example by raising funds and providing practical support for a range of charities, such as when each form purchases a Christmas tree which, along with a bag of decorations and food, is donated to economically disadvantaged local families.
- 3.20 Pupils' social awareness is excellent, reflecting the emphasis the school places on respect and responsibility, and this helps to create an extremely harmonious community. They co-operate well in every aspect of school life, both in lessons and elsewhere. For example, older prep pupils read to younger children on a weekly basis. Pupils of all ages play happily together at break times. They acquire excellent social skills through the many opportunities the school provides to engage with others in joint ventures, such as the house drama productions in which older pupils socialise and work well with younger pupils. They collaborate effectively to achieve common goals, such as when completing DofE expeditions. In interviews, pupils spoke of a caring, supportive and happy community in which they show real, genuine concern for each other. Most parents agree that the school helps their children become confident and independent and develop strong teamwork and social skills.
- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent understanding of cultural diversity and awareness of individual differences. They treat one another with kindness and consideration within a community that is calm, convivial and inclusive. Pupils commented upon how quickly new pupils are assimilated into the school community due to the open and welcoming atmosphere. Most parents and a large majority of pupils felt that the school encourages a culture of respect and tolerance. Inspection evidence shows the successful outcome of this encouragement. For example, by the provision of a Muslim prayer room and the cordial manner in which pupils discuss differences in their faith with each other. Pupils show a thorough knowledge of fundamental British values, which are developed through a comprehensive PSHE programme. In a discussion, pupils in the prep school showed an excellent understanding of what diversity, inclusion, empathy and respect mean and were vociferous in their insistence that there is no place for discrimination or racism in their school.
- 3.22 All pupils show a good understanding of healthy living, although a few parents and a small minority of pupils commented in the questionnaire that the school did not encourage pupils to follow a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors found that pupils benefit from provision of nutritious and healthy food in school, and the many opportunities for exercise. The youngest children understand the importance of washing hands and eating healthy food, and about how their body might feel after exercise. Discussions with pupils reveal that they are aware of the importance of good nutrition and value the fresh fruit and vegetables available at mealtimes. Pupils appreciate the importance of physical fitness and make good use of the numerous outdoor play facilities as well as the more formal sports programme. Pupils acquire skills to manage stress and maintain positive mental health, and they are well supported in this by school staff, many of whom are trained in mental health first aid. In RSE and PSHE lessons, older pupils learn to identify abusive or coercive relationships and so develop an understanding of keeping safe in later life. Most pupils said they understand how to stay safe online, and in interviews all could name a trusted adult they could talk to if they have any concerns.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with 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 form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr William Ibbetson-Price	Reporting inspector
Mr Timothy Cannell	Compliance team inspector (Acting head, IAPS school)
Mr Nicholas Baker	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Claire Preece	Team inspector (Deputy head academic, GSA school)
Mr Martin Stott	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr John Watson	Team inspector (Head, HMC school)
Mrs Sian Woosnam	Team inspector (Assistant head Early Years, SoH school)
Mrs Ros Ford	Co-ordinating inspector for early years (Former deputy head, IAPS school)