



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**SUTTON VALENCE SCHOOL**

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION**

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## Sutton Valence School

The preparatory school was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of School	<b>Sutton Valence School</b>
DfE Number	<b>886/6019</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>309267</b>
Address	<b>Sutton Valence School North Street Sutton Valence Maidstone Kent ME17 3HL</b>
Telephone Number	<b>01622 845203</b>
Fax Number	<b>01622 845301</b>
Email Address	<b>hmsec@svs.org.uk</b>
Headmaster	<b>Mr Bruce Grindlay</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Bryan Baughan</b>
Age Range	<b>11 to 18</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>489</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (322 boys; 167 girls)</b>
Number of Day Pupils	Total: <b>338</b>
Number of Boarders	Total: <b>151</b> Full: <b>51</b> Weekly: <b>100</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>26 Nov 2013 to 29 Nov 2013</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in October 2009.

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

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

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

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

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

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where Achievement is 'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade.** Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. **For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', '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 governors and another governor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Dr Joe Tierney	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Pauline Clark	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, GSA school)
Miss Rowan Edbrooke	Team Inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mr Nicholas Marchant	Team Inspector (Housemaster, HMC school)
Mr Gerry Pike	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, HMC school)
Mr Alun Watkins	Team Inspector (Head, HMC school)
Mr Gregg Davies	Co-ordinating Inspector for Boarding
Miss Liz Knibb	Team Inspector for Boarding (Deputy Head, HMC school)

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

- 1.1 Sutton Valence is a mixed day and boarding school for pupils aged 11 to 18. It is situated in the Kent village of the same name, about 45 miles from London. Sutton Valence also has a preparatory school on a nearby site which has its own head, but the overall responsibility for management rests with the headmaster of the senior school.
- 1.2 The school was founded by William Lambe in 1576, and its original aim was to educate boys from local families and the sons of clothworkers. It was governed by the Worshipful Company of Clothworkers until 1910, when it became part of The United Westminster Schools Foundation, an educational charity. The charity also encompasses an independent day school and a boys' comprehensive school, both in London. The foundation acts as a resource to the school and the governing body by keeping them apprised of changes in legislation, employment rules and pension arrangements, and by working with the school bursar and the governors' finance and buildings committee. Governance is administered by a main board, with assistance from various committees – education, finance and buildings, personnel, health and safety, and strategy, as well as one for the preparatory school and bursaries.
- 1.3 The aims of the school are to provide a caring, supportive and inclusive environment and a challenging, relevant and broad curriculum. The school seeks to offer a comprehensive range of sporting, artistic, cultural and social activities, and opportunities so that pupils can develop skills, such as teamwork, self-discipline and leadership. It sets out to achieve this within a safe, secure and stimulating environment that encourages excellence, independence and high standards, while providing support to all pupils. The school also aims to offer grounding in moral and spiritual understanding which promotes respect for others, along with self-respect.
- 1.4 At the time of the inspection, there were 489 pupils on the roll, with 151 boarders and 146 pupils in the sixth form. The majority of pupils are of white British origin and based in the UK, with under a tenth from overseas, for example China, Germany and Nepal. Most are from professional families, and the school offers a significant number of scholarships. Seventy-five pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and all receive additional support from the school. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Twenty-nine pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL), all of whom receive support with learning English.
- 1.5 The school is selective and the ability profile is above the national average, with two-thirds of pupils having ability that is at least above average. Pupils entering the sixth form are slightly below the national average, with a fairly wide spread of abilities represented. Pupils are placed in one of four day houses, or four boarding houses, organised according to age and gender.

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

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

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

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

- 2.1 Sutton Valence provides an excellent education and the pupils' personal development is strong. It is supported by excellent pastoral care, a vast range of challenging activities and, for those that board, an excellent boarding education that encourages the development of key personal skills and confidence. There is a clear philosophy within the school, based on the belief of enabling all pupils to achieve their potential. This permeates the school's work so that it successfully meets its aim of providing a caring, supportive and inclusive community, with a particular focus on the needs of the individual pupil. Both pupils and staff work well together and develop a mutual respect. The results of questionnaires show that both pupils and parents are extremely pleased with the school.
- 2.2 Pupils achieve well in their academic studies because of the good teaching and support they receive. Whilst some teaching is excellent, the school recognises some scope for improvement. Results at GCSE and A level have improved since 2010. Pupils make good progress in their academic work. Their education is considerably enhanced by the extensive range of extra-curricular activities provided. This is a great strength of the school, with the pupils responding by achieving considerable success, especially in sport, music, art and drama.
- 2.3 Excellent governance has ensured that the school has developed very well, with high levels of staffing and resources, and that the safeguarding and health and safety of pupils are firmly established. The excellent leadership from senior management provides a clear educational vision that drives much of the work of the school. Highly effective management ensures that effective practices and policies are in operation. Plans for the development of the school recognise appropriate issues for improvement, including establishing greater consistency in planning for subject development and teaching within subject departments.
- 2.4 Excellent progress has been made since the previous inspection. Both the pastoral system and the curriculum have been improved, as has pupils' behaviour. Significant progress has been made in improving the provision for able, gifted and talented pupils, in response to the recommendation of the previous inspection. The school continues to develop strong links with parents.

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

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

- 2.5 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.
- 2.6 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011.

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

- 2.7 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Raise the standard of teaching and learning to that of the best.
  2. Achieve greater consistency in the management of subject departments to improve the planning for subject development, the curriculum and 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' achievements and learning is good.
- 3.2 Pupils are well educated and the school is successful in meeting its vision to enable them to fulfil their true potential and add value to their lives.
- 3.3 Pupils demonstrate good knowledge, understanding and skill in a wide variety of academic and extra-curricular activities. They are highly articulate, speaking with clarity and confidence. The quality of their writing is good, and in some cases excellent, for example in a moving essay on the subject of loss and bereavement. Pupils are adept at applying their mathematical skills, for example in chemistry and physics, and make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) when opportunities arise. They show pride in their work and organise their files and notebooks well. Evidence of their strong creativity was seen in music, drama and art, with artwork of a high standard exhibited in a London gallery. They have won a range of medals at all levels of a mathematics challenge and also participate regularly in the Model United Nations. The majority of pupils move into higher education when they leave, with almost half gaining places at competitive universities.
- 3.4 Pupils achieve great success in their extra-curricular activities. A good number gain places on regional teams, including rugby and cricket, whereas in sports such as hockey, fencing, golf and canoeing they enjoy international representation. Those involved in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) are especially successful, and the shooting team repeatedly wins several categories at Bisley. Pupils excel in their musical and theatrical endeavours and have staged theatrical productions, such as *We Will Rock You*, and performed Britten's *Simple Symphony* at Christchurch, Spitalfields.
- 3.5 In the period from 2010-2012, from which national comparisons can be made, results at GCSE were above the average for maintained schools. Most grades awarded were A\* to C and in 2013 just under half of grades were A\*/A. This shows that pupils are making good progress to Year 11. The GCSE results have shown a steady improvement over the last four years. In the International GCSE, mathematics results have been above the international and national averages. At A level, results have been similar to those of maintained selective schools over the period from 2010 to 2012, with 58% of grades at A\* to B in 2013. This shows that pupils make good progress in the sixth form.
- 3.6 All pupils, including the most able and those with SEND, make good progress. The progress of pupils with SEND is measured through a range of psychometric tests at various points in the year, and these pupils achieve well in public examinations. The success of pupils with EAL is demonstrated in their entry to universities.
- 3.7 Pupils' attitudes to work are good and in many cases excellent. They are good listeners and understand and are motivated by the 'target grade system'. They are quick to settle down, work well with each other, and are willing to experiment and work things out for themselves.

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

- 3.8 The contribution of the curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.9 The curriculum is broadly based at every level, so fulfilling the school's aim to provide a rounded and relevant education. It offers a high level of challenge, support and development to all pupils, with an emphasis on nurturing the individual that is both cultural and systemic. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 study a good range of subjects, including French, religious studies, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and ICT. In Year 9, they choose two creative subjects from design and technology, art and drama, music and home economics, and all join the CCF. Some pupils choose to study a second modern foreign language, which is either French or Spanish. Some pupils opt for learning support at these times.
- 3.10 The curriculum has been enhanced since the previous inspection. There is now more academic contact time, so achieving a better equilibrium between the curricular and the extra-curricular. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 have a study skills lesson that aims to foster more thoughtful and independent study. Year 9 pupils are developing a 'portfolio', similar to the extended project now offered to scholars in Year 12.
- 3.11 The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is framed very effectively to achieve a suitable balance between core and optional subjects. The creative and practical subjects are represented very well, and all pupils continue with history or geography and an appropriate science course. Setting takes place in mathematics, English, science and languages; there is some setting in history and geography, and class sizes are small. A wide range of AS and A-level courses is offered in the sixth form, very well supplemented with careers advice and community work.
- 3.12 Very effective careers advice begins in Year 7 and is part of the regular curriculum. It ensures that the choices pupils make are well informed and personal. Its centrepiece is a school careers convention and there is an explicit emphasis on guiding pupils as individuals. Pupils value the careers guidance they receive.
- 3.13 Pupils with SEND are given very good support by specialist teachers, either individually or in small groups. The department seeks to empower pupils as confident learners and to help them to succeed in mainstream education. Pupils with EAL are provided with the support they require for their English.
- 3.14 Since the previous inspection, there has been a considerable expansion in the provision for the most able, gifted and talented pupils. This is with the aim of enhancing and celebrating academic scholarship in the school generally. An ambitious programme is evolving; it includes lectures to a scholarly society, the Model United Nations, inter-house debates and various essay competitions. A Year 9 word-building 'portmanteau' challenge, jointly organised by the mathematics and English departments, has also been piloted. The performance of scholars is now monitored closely, using the 'target grade system'.
- 3.15 The extra-curricular programme is a defining feature of the school and highly valued by pupils and parents. It offers a vast range of activities and varied opportunities for personal growth and self-expression. It helps pupils to develop new interests, to become expert in niche sports, to serve the community, to acquire teamwork and leadership skills, and to develop self-esteem. The programme includes a thriving CCF section, which organises competitions, adventurous training and foreign trips, such as to Brunei in 2013. For many pupils this leads naturally to participation in

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. A new leadership course in Years 7 and 8 offers an enterprising innovation. Many individual sports flourish, such as fencing, archery, golf, shooting and judo, as do music, drama and dance.

- 3.16 The organisation of myriad off-site visits, including foreign exchange trips, sport and music tours, helps pupils to look outwards and significantly enriches their experience, while community service for Year 12 helps to affirm the school's place in its local community. Parents appreciate and support this extensive programme.

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

- 3.17 The contribution of teaching is good.
- 3.18 The good teaching enables the school to be largely successful in meeting its aim to encourage and help the pupils to reach their academic potential.
- 3.19 Teaching was good or better in almost two out of three lessons observed. Teachers know pupils well, relationships are strong and respectful, and pupils benefit from the individual help given in and outside lessons. This is a significant factor in the good progress that pupils make. Care is taken to foster a supportive learning environment; the pupils work well together, their attitude to learning is positive and they benefit from the sharing of ideas and from mutual support and encouragement.
- 3.20 The most successful lessons are characterised by clear explanations and strong subject knowledge; pupils engage fully with imaginative tasks, learning is active and thorough, and teachers employ a range of teaching methods. These lessons are engaging, purposeful and characterised by a brisk pace, and, due to careful planning, also address the needs of all abilities. Teachers have high expectations and ask probing questions, well suited to the individual and requiring pupils to think independently and to apply their learning. Practical demonstrations and well-targeted activities are incorporated effectively to reinforce understanding.
- 3.21 In less successful teaching, the encouragement of independent learning is limited, low expectations lead to over direction by the teacher and lessons lack pace and intellectual challenge. On the rare occasions observed when engagement by individual pupils was limited, it could be attributed to poor planning, resulting in lack of structure and variety in teaching. Information and communication technology is successfully used in some subjects, but was not widely seen in the lessons observed.
- 3.22 The developing culture of lesson observation and work scrutiny is intended to raise the standard of teaching across the school to that of the best. Teachers recognise its value but its impact is not consistent across all departments.
- 3.23 Assessment procedures are thorough. Marking varies in quality and at its best is regular, constructive and generous, setting high expectations and providing strong feedback. The tracking of pupils' progress is detailed and regular, and pupils are guided thoughtfully in setting themselves appropriate targets for improvement. This is appreciated by pupils and parents, and enhances motivation and achievement. The recent addition of awarding a grade for prep, in addition to those awarded for achievement and effort, has increased awareness of the significance of independent work.

- 3.24 Awareness of support for pupils of all abilities is evident in the best lessons, where intellectual challenge, pace and rigour flourish. This is not the case in the less successful lessons and continues to be an area for development.
- 3.25 Pupils with SEND are well supported in their lessons with specialist teachers. These pupils and those with EAL are at ease and integrated in mainstream lessons. Class teachers are aware of their individual needs, but accommodation of those needs is inconsistent. Whilst small class sizes are generally of benefit, not all teaching takes advantage of them and, on occasion, willing pupils are not sufficiently involved. The recent introduction of specialist SEND support in mathematics and English is beneficial.
- 3.26 Teaching is well supported by a good range of resources that are generally used effectively, the exception being some inconsistency in the imaginative use of ICT. The library is an attractive and welcoming space, with a good provision of relevant and up-to-date books, although the quantity and quality of the book stock are limited in science.

## **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 pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 The pupils' personal qualities are developed in accordance with the school's aim; they are cared for, supported and part of an inclusive community.
- 4.3 The spiritual development of pupils enables them to develop self-esteem and self-confidence. Through the chapel committee, with representatives from all year groups, pupils are actively involved in shaping the chapel services and headmaster's assemblies. The latter is an inclusive occasion which embraces pupils' participation and celebrates their achievements. Pupils gain spiritual support from the chaplaincy, which conveys the message of 'faith in action'; this is evident in the behaviour and responses of the pupils.
- 4.4 The pupils' moral development is excellent. Their awareness of the needs of others is shown by their involvement in a range of fund-raising activities that often touch upon causes close to their hearts, such as their support for cancer research and cystic fibrosis. The CCF has raised money for blind veterans and has been recognised with the award of a challenge trophy for cadets. Pupils have a well-developed sense of right and wrong, which is reflected in their behaviour about the school. They readily respond to a range of issues discussed in PSHE, covering such topics as manners, tolerance, relationships, addiction and internet safety.
- 4.5 The social development of pupils is excellent. They are fully aware of the opportunities they are offered, and a strong sense of community pervades the school. Pupils are highly loyal to the school and grow in confidence because of the support they are given. They also develop socially through the reporting system and the use of personal target setting, to which they respond positively. Pupils appreciate the extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities, which expands their horizons and enriches their social and cultural experience. They gain from the interaction between pupils of different ages in their tutor groups, which provide opportunities for mutual support. They also develop a sense of consideration and empathy for others through the mentoring programme. Pupils understand the democratic role they can play in making a contribution, through such groups as the food committee and school council. They respond positively to these, and to the posts of responsibility at tutor, house and school level. In the revised PSHE programme, which includes national matters, pupils discuss such topics as education reforms.
- 4.6 Pupils' awareness of other cultures is enhanced by a range of overseas visits, foreign exchanges, and trips to theatres and exhibitions. For example, pupils have undertaken informative visits, both locally and abroad, to such destinations as Brunei, India and Martinique. They are aware of the world around them, and their cultural awareness is enriched by the international diversity of boarders.

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

- 4.7 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.8 The school successfully meets its aim of providing a caring, supportive and inclusive community, with particular focus on the needs of the individual pupil.
- 4.9 Pupils receive much excellent advice from a range of adults. The strong relationships between staff and pupils are characterised by mutual respect, tolerance and friendliness. Tutor groups are small and this allows for much individual attention. Parents' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire reflect an overwhelming view that the pastoral care provided is of an extremely high quality.
- 4.10 The mixed-age tutor groups provide senior pupils with opportunities to set an example to others. An excellent and highly respected peer support programme is at the heart of these arrangements. Tutors and housemasters give willingly of their time and know their tutees well. Pupils said that they are able to turn to a member of staff or fellow pupil if they have a personal difficulty. This care, with specific emphasis on close links with parents and feeder schools, supports the personal development of each pupil. The school counsellor and the medical centre provide further support to aid the well-being and health education of all pupils. The excellent work of prefects as peer mentors offers additional support to new pupils.
- 4.11 The food available is of good quality and the school is committed to promoting an active lifestyle. Pupils are able to engage in regular exercise and aspects of the PSHE programme seek to promote healthy living.
- 4.12 Standards of behaviour are high and there are thorough policies to promote good behaviour and tackle bullying. Pupils believe that the procedures to deal with instances of bullying are robust and publicised. Scrutiny of the record of sanctions shows that there is little bullying. There is a comprehensive system of rewards and sanctions which is respected by pupils. Clear lines of communication with the senior management team ensure that pastoral concerns and disciplinary matters are dealt with promptly. Parents have ready access to the policies and pupils respond positively to the system of rewards, such as the 'blue points' system that recognises pupils' efforts and contributions.
- 4.13 Many opportunities are available for pupils to express their opinions. Excellent discussions occur in tutor groups; housemasters and housemistresses meet regularly with tutor groups, and prefects meet weekly with senior leadership staff. The school council is effective in representing the opinions of pupils and the leadership is easy to contact through his 'open-door' policy. Pupils can relay confidential information to senior staff through their website portal.
- 4.14 In the pupils' questionnaire responses, less positive views were expressed about a few issues. These included: prep; listening to pupils' views; the fairness of teachers; the provision of food; and the safety of pupils' belongings. However, the conversations inspectors had with pupils indicated that they were not concerned about these matters. The atmosphere in the school is conducive to openness and pupils have many opportunities to express their views and opinions.
- 4.15 Within its sloping site, the school has taken all reasonable steps to improve educational access for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

- 4.16 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is excellent.
- 4.17 The school is conscientious with regard to safeguarding and thorough with respect to its duties for child protection. The procedures for safe recruitment are followed and accurate records are kept. A well-qualified senior teacher takes responsibility for child protection and good procedures ensure appropriate communication amongst associated pastoral teams. All staff receive child protection training, which is updated regularly and recorded. Some senior pupils also receive training. The governing body has received an annual report from the governor with responsibility for child protection. The policy has been formally reviewed, adopted and recorded in the board's minutes.
- 4.18 The school ensures, through a health and safety committee, that its policies and procedures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards are up to date, and a governor reports annually to the board. The use of an external health and safety advisor helps to focus the work of the committee. Regular fire drills are held and records are kept; these inform any improvement in evacuation procedures. External contractors are accompanied and those without appropriate safeguarding checks are constantly supervised.
- 4.19 The provision for pupils who are ill is highly effective. Pupils value the pastoral care and healthcare provided by the dedicated medical team in the well-operated medical centre. Training for medical support is good, with all staff at the school having a first aid at work qualification.
- 4.20 Admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained and stored in accordance with regulations.

#### **4.(d) The quality of boarding**

- 4.21 The quality of boarding is excellent.
- 4.22 Outcomes for boarders are extremely good. The boarding environment encourages them to develop integrity, tolerance, self-esteem and confidence without arrogance. They live and work well together and develop a mutual respect that permeates every aspect of their busy lives. Boarders from overseas are fully integrated into the boarding houses and their views and culture are valued by the school community.
- 4.23 Boarders talk openly and with warmth about their experience of living together. They acknowledge and understand the beneficial effect which boarding has on their independence and self-reliance, although they value too the comradeship that develops. A boarders' committee meets regularly and the minutes, together with management responses, are disseminated. Boarders know that their views are respected and that they can influence change. Regular competitions are organised during the week, both within and between houses. These range from talent shows to indoor football, and whilst there is a friendly rivalry amongst boarders the nature of the events demonstrates their overt kindness to one another. Trips are organised regularly; for example, the girls' house went to a London theatre to see a dramatisation of a popular children's story.
- 4.24 Senior boarders have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills; this is valued by younger boarders and by boarding staff. Relationships between boarders and boarding staff are excellent. Matrons and housekeepers are genuinely valued and

provide a high standard of support to the dedicated house staff. Boarders can turn to numerous staff for advice, including independent listeners, who have visited each boarding house.

- 4.25 The quality of boarding provision and care is excellent. Boarders in all houses are very well cared for by a dedicated staff team. The recently introduced induction programme for parents and pupils, along with a system of 'buddying', enables pupils to settle quickly and easily into their new routine. Boarders state that they feel safe at school and that their possessions are secure.
- 4.26 Excellent communication between pastoral and academic staff ensures that information on academic performance is shared effectively, that individual needs are met and, where appropriate, that individual care plans are drawn up by house staff. Regular contact with parents by email or telephone enables them to be fully informed of their children's progress and welfare. All boarders are able to maintain contact with their families by telephone or through the internet. Designated times for pupils to access the internet allow communication with families living in different time zones.
- 4.27 The medical centre offers excellent daytime care, with overnight provision made for boarders who are too unwell to remain in the house. Matrons accompany boarders who have local medical, dental or ophthalmic appointments. House staff have training in first aid and there are secure procedures for the administration of medicines. A few pupils who are deemed 'Gillick competent' self-medicate. All medicines prescribed from overseas are authenticated before being administered.
- 4.28 Since the previous inspection there has been a rolling programme of refurbishment to ensure that the premises, accommodation and facilities are maintained to a high standard. The accommodation is comfortable and smart, and there are excellent recreation areas and well-appointed kitchens with plentiful supplies of snacks and drinks. The laundry service is rapid and efficient.
- 4.29 Overall, food is of good quality and quantity and there is always a choice. Individual dietary needs are catered for and the catering manager is quick to respond to suggestions from pupils. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire some pupils expressed negative views about the food provided in the refectory in the evenings. Inspectors found some evidence to support this in that there is not always sufficient choice for those arriving later at supper.
- 4.30 Throughout the week, boarders are offered an outstanding range of activities, both school and house based, such as a Halloween 'fright night' or a pyjama party. House newspapers and televisions enable pupils to access information about events in the world outside school. Boarders enjoy the mixture of directed and free time and have quiet, safe spaces where they can be alone if they wish.
- 4.31 The effectiveness of arrangements for welfare and safeguarding is excellent. Procedures to ensure the safety of boarders are implemented efficiently. All staff involved in boarding are regularly trained in safeguarding. Associated welfare policies are known to staff and they are aware of how to implement these. Policies to promote good behaviour are observed; there is a high degree of mutual respect within the boarding communities. Excellent communication amongst staff involved in the houses enables thorough and seamless handovers at the end and beginning of duties. Staff know the boarders extremely well. Job descriptions have been produced for all boarding staff and house prefects. People visiting the boarding

houses are accompanied, and they are supervised if full safeguarding checks have not been possible.

- 4.32 The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the boarding provision is excellent. Boarding houses are extremely well led by dedicated staff. In all houses emphasis is placed on teamwork, with resident tutors, 'out-tutors', matrons and housekeepers all playing a valued and collaborative role. These teams are managed skilfully by those in charge of the individual houses.
- 4.33 Boarding houses submit annual development plans to the senior management and are given the opportunity to discuss them. Senior house staff meet regularly and minutes are available to all staff. Boarders are also routinely encouraged to contribute their views and they feel that their voice is heard. Boarding staff appreciate their opportunities for professional development. All necessary boarding documentation and policies are suitably formulated, and the National Minimum Standards are a source of dialogue between the senior boarding staff and the school's senior leadership. Parents and boarders confirm that they feel the houses are well led and managed.

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

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

- 5.1 The quality of governance is excellent.
- 5.2 This high standard is evident in the school's continuing success and excellence in many areas. Administrative arrangements for governance are effective. The work of the main board is aided by a variety of committees, such as those for education, personnel, finance and buildings, and the preparatory school. A group comprising the chairs of these committees considers the strategic direction of the school. These committees meet at appropriate intervals. Thoughtful planning and astute business acumen have led to excellent improvement since the previous inspection.
- 5.3 Governors know the school very well and there is strong liaison between the chair and senior managers. In addition, the leadership and bursar provide detailed and informative written reports to the board. Governors have also had presentations from members of the teaching staff, for example in particular subjects, which have been helpful in informing them of aspects of the school's provision. Communication at formal and informal levels is clear and supportive. Some governors have visited classrooms to observe lessons and more such visits are planned. Steps are taken to rectify any perceived weaknesses.
- 5.4 Governors have a very wide range and depth of expertise and experience. They are particularly strong in the field of education, but also in finance and health and safety. Further valuable support is provided through the United Westminster Schools Foundation, for example in employment law and personnel. This expertise is used very well and some governors act as links to the school on such matters as child protection, boarding and health and safety. The system for the recruitment, induction and training of governors has been effective.
- 5.5 Close attention is paid to regulatory matters, and requirements are discharged effectively. Annual reports on child protection and health and safety are reviewed and adopted by the main board. Governors have ensured that the school's accommodation and resources, including staffing, are of a high standard. Heads of department submit budgets for consideration and report that they feel their provision is of a high standard.

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

- 5.6 The quality of leadership and management is excellent.
- 5.7 This quality enables the school to fulfil its principal aims. The continued improvement of the school reflects the excellent leadership provided by the senior management team. The team has a clear philosophy, based on the school's aims, which now permeates its work and that of others. Central to this is a belief in enabling all pupils to achieve their potential and to succeed. The consequence is a school with a strong sense of community where pupils and staff show respect for one another and strive for improvement. This clear educational direction and philosophy emanate from the highest level. The excellent leadership and management have resulted in high quality provision in many areas, particularly in the pupils' personal development and in the breadth of their educational experience.
- 5.8 The school has made excellent progress since the previous inspection. In particular, the house system has been reorganised, the curriculum developed, and the school's commitment to the individual has been reinforced and improved. At the time of the previous inspection, a significant minority of parents had reservations concerning the standards of pupils' behaviour, but the most recent questionnaire shows that almost all believe behaviour to be good. The school has addressed the issue of provision for the gifted and talented by developing an ambitious programme of enrichment activities. This programme is at the forefront of the school's aim to raise academic achievement.
- 5.9 A clear and effective structure for the management of the school is in place. The central hub is the steering group of senior staff, which drives the work of other committees concerned with academic and pastoral matters. Senior staff are very successful in their duties and this results in excellent pastoral care and boarding education. The management of subject departments is good overall and, although some is excellent, it is variable in quality. The school recognises a need for more even provision and has recently appointed a deputy head to work with heads of department to monitor the academic curriculum. The school development plan recognises further work to be undertaken in achieving consistency, for example in planning for subject development and teaching within departments.
- 5.10 Policies and practices ensure the smooth running of the school, particularly those relating to the safeguarding of pupils and their health and safety.
- 5.11 Management has been highly successful in recruiting and supporting sufficient high quality staff. For example, there is an excellent induction scheme for new staff and an ethos amongst all staff which encourages the sharing of good practice. Staff are encouraged to attend training courses and accurate records are kept of their attendance.
- 5.12 Comprehensive reports are sent to parents each term. They contain grades for effort and attainment, alongside target grades, which are cumulative and therefore give a picture over a whole year. Much effort is spent on producing comments, although they focus more on pupils' attitudes than their attainment.
- 5.13 Parents are notably happy with the school. The results of the questionnaire showed uniformly high levels of satisfaction across all areas. Parents are particularly pleased with the range of experiences given to their children, the information

provided about the school and its policies, and communication. They have a high regard for the school's leadership and feel that their children are happy and safe. Some were less pleased with parents' involvement in the school, and the school has recognised this in its development plan. Links with parents are strong and continue to be reinforced, for example with the introduction of electronic newsletters, greater contact with senior staff and their involvement with careers guidance. The development of the parents' portal has helped to strengthen parents' sense of academic partnership with the school over prep and academic work. Communication with parents on pastoral matters has been considerably enhanced through information evenings. Houses hold parents' breakfasts, and as part of the pupil induction day, closer links have been forged between tutors and parents.

- 5.14 Relatively few complaints are received from parents. Careful records are kept and the school deals with any swiftly and fairly, often taking much time to investigate any concerns.

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