



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INTEGRATED INSPECTION

OUR LADY'S ABINGDON

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Our Lady's Abingdon

Full Name of School	Our Lady's Abingdon
DfE Number	931/6076
Registered Charity Number	1120372
Address	Our Lady's Abingdon Radley Road Abingdon Oxfordshire OX14 3PS
Telephone Number	01235 524658
Fax Number	01235 535829
Email Address	office@olab.org.uk
Principal	Mr Stephen Oliver
Chairman of Governors	Mr Edward McCabe
Age Range	3 to 18
Total Number of Pupils	503
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (232 boys; 271 girls)
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS): 31 5-11: 100 11-18: 372
Head of EYFS Setting	Mr Brendan O'Neill
EYFS Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	24 Nov 2015 to 27 Nov 2015

PREFACE

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.

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*. The inspection on which the report is based took place over a period of four continuous days in the school.

The previous ISI standard inspection was in March 2010.

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.

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 children aged under two), 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 chairman of governors and other governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited 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

Mr George Fisher	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Clare Bruce	Team Inspector (Head of Infants and Juniors, HMC school)
Mr Rick James	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, HMC school)
Mr Tony Nelson	Team Inspector (Director of Studies, HMC school)
Mr Stephen Roberts	Team Inspector (Principal, HMC/GSA schools)
Mr John Tuson	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, HMC school)
Mrs Jane Morgan	Co-ordinating Inspector for Early Years

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Our Lady's Abingdon is a co-educational day school in the centre of Abingdon, a small town around ten miles south of Oxford. It was founded in 1860 by the Institute of Our Lady of Mercy, an order of Catholic religious sisters established in Ireland in 1831 to provide for the poor and uneducated. The school seeks to educate pupils in accordance with the ethos of the Catholic Church, welcoming pupils of all faiths and those of none. Within this, the school's aims are to encourage respect for the worth of the individual, to enable all pupils to achieve their full potential and to guide pupils to make informed moral choices. Governance is devolved by the order to a charity whose trustees form the governing body. The junior school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), is on the same site as the senior school, with a number of facilities being shared across the school.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, a new principal has been appointed, and the senior school leadership team has been restructured. Further changes have seen the consolidation of co-education across the senior school, so that the first boys to enter Year 7 are now in Year 13. A design and technology facility has been created, the sixth-form centre has been refurbished, a new dining space has been provided and there is a new multi-use games area available to all pupils.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection there were 503 pupils, including 232 boys and 271 girls. The junior school comprised 16 full-time and 15 part-time children in the EYFS, and a further 100 pupils in Years 1 to 6. In the senior school there were 290 pupils in Years 7 to 11, and 82 in Years 12 and 13. The ability profile of the pupils is above the national average at all stages within the school. The great majority of pupils are of white British backgrounds, reflecting the local community. Most pupils come from professional families.
- 1.4 Twelve pupils receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), with one having an education, health and care (EHC) plan, and none having a statement of special educational needs. There are thirty-eight pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL), of whom five receive extra support within the school.
- 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 school is successful in providing a good quality of education and meeting its aim to encourage respect for the individual and, through this, to develop self-confidence. The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning is good. Throughout the school pupils are well motivated, communicate easily and have well-developed skills for learning. Since the previous inspection, the overall quality of marking has improved, and some progress has been made in making greater provision in lessons for the most able; there is increased sharing of resources between junior and senior schools. Pupils throughout the school, including the most able and those with SEND or EAL, make good progress in relation to their ability. Curricular and extra-curricular provision is good, providing a secure base for academic study, with an extensive range of subject options within the senior school. Since the previous inspection, the provision for outdoor education in the EYFS has been enhanced, along with improvements to the surface outside the Nursery class. However, the location of the Reception classroom means that opportunities for spontaneous outdoor learning are more limited for the older children in the EYFS. Pupils perform strongly in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including within sport and the creative arts. The overall quality of teaching throughout the school is good, and it is excellent within the EYFS. Teaching lacks consistency, and while most is marked by careful planning, pace and challenge, less effective teaching shows a lower level of expectation and provision, for example in marking, where the recommendation from the previous inspection has not yet been met fully.
- 2.2 The pupils' good personal development is apparent in their increasing self-confidence and in the easy manner in which they relate to their peers, both older and younger, and to adults. Pupils are self-aware, reflective and well grounded, recognising their responsibilities to one another and to their community. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a small minority of pupils commented that the school does not always manage cases of bullying successfully. However, in discussions, pupils said that bullying is extremely rare and that when it has occurred it was managed effectively by staff. The school has strong measures to counter cyber-bullying. Pastoral care is excellent, particularly within the EYFS and the junior school. High standards of behaviour are generally maintained. Measures to promote welfare, health and safety are good. Whilst the site is well maintained overall, some areas within the senior school, including lavatories, are not cleaned well enough. Good governance is provided through a committed and well-informed board. Financial management is particularly strong, and there is a shared vision for the future development of the school. Governance is well structured, and it provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge for the school's leadership. However, whilst governance understands its responsibilities for safeguarding, it has not ensured that the recruitment procedure is implemented sufficiently rigorously: medical checks on a few staff, and clearance checks on some governors, were not completed before they took up their positions at the school. Leadership and management of the school are good, and recent restructuring of the senior school leadership team has helped to establish a clear strategy for its educational direction, firmly focused on meeting the individual needs of pupils. Links with parents are excellent, and the vast majority expressed their strong approval for the educational opportunities provided and for the support their children receive.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

2.3 The school does not meet all the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and therefore it is required to take the following action.

- Ensure that, in future, medical checks are carried out on all staff before they begin work at the school, and that enhanced criminal record checks are carried out on all governors before or as soon as practicable after they take up their positions [Part 4, paragraphs 18.(2)(c)(ii), 18.(3) and 20.(6)(b)(i), under Suitability of staff and proprietors, and for the same reason Part 3, paragraphs 7.(a) and (b), under Welfare health and safety].

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.4 In addition to the above regulatory action points, the school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Improve the consistency of teaching by drawing on the best practice evident in the school so that the needs of all pupils are identified and met.
2. Improve the tidiness and cleanliness of the cloakroom areas and the toilets within the senior school.
3. Within the EYFS, improve opportunities for older children to access outdoor areas.

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 At all stages the school is successful in meeting its aim to provide an education based on the principle of 'each according to their needs', in the area of academic achievement. Children in the EYFS enjoy their learning and make excellent progress in relation to their starting points. By the end of Reception the majority of children are achieving at least the age-related expected level of development, and they are fully prepared for the next stage of their education. More able children use their knowledge of the sounds letters make when reading, and all are keen to share their books with adults. They enjoy practising their writing skills in a variety of ways, using the wide range of resources available to them, and many are able to construct simple sentences with minimal adult support. Reception children count confidently to 30 and beyond, and they develop their ability to add and subtract as part of problem-solving activities. Nursery children actively engage in purposeful play, both independently and with their peers. For example, boys confidently raced programmable toys, and were delighted by being able to "make them dance". All children concentrate well, playing and exploring confidently whilst developing their knowledge and understanding, as well as their creative and fine motor skills. Tasks are carefully planned to offer challenge and extension for the more able children, as well as to provide appropriate support and consolidation for those with EAL.
- 3.3 Pupils across the school are articulate and willing contributors in lessons, often asking probing questions. They usually listen well to their peers, and write clearly and in a range of styles, such as creative and expressive writing in Year 6, and detailed and analytical essays in the sixth form. They read confidently, within both their own language and modern foreign languages, and some read purely for pleasure. Pupils' creativity is evident throughout the school and is developed strongly within a range of subjects. Logical thought is apparent within mathematics, and when learning to program within information and communication technology (ICT). Numeracy is developed successfully in geography and the sciences. Pupils apply their physical skills successfully to a range of sporting and recreational pursuits.
- 3.4 Pupils achieve significant success in many areas. In the junior school this ranges from gaining black belts in judo, to reaching the county final of a small schools' football competition. In the senior school, netball teams regularly win county honours, and the senior tennis team has reached a national final. Pupils secure leading roles in local dramatic productions, whilst others join the county youth orchestra. The vast majority of junior school pupils are successful in transferring to the senior school, and most pupils in Year 13 gain places at their first choice of university.
- 3.5 Within the junior school, inspection evidence, including analysis of the school's data, together with a scrutiny of pupils' work and lesson observations, shows that the pupils' attainment is good. This level of attainment, taken alongside other evidence, and including interviews with pupils, shows that pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points.
- 3.6 Within the senior school, the following analysis uses the national data for the years 2012 to 2014. These are the most recent three years for which comparable

statistics are currently available. At GCSE, results were above the national average for maintained schools but showed a decline from 2012 to 2014. In 2012, results were similar to the national average for girls in maintained selective schools. In 2014, International GCSE (IGCSE) results in English language were above worldwide averages, and results in English literature and mathematics were similar to worldwide averages. A-level results have been above the national average for maintained schools, and similar to the national average for maintained selective schools. Results at GCSE, IGCSE and A level showed an improvement in 2015 on those in 2014. The level of attainment at GCSE, and standardised measures of progress that are available, indicate that pupils make progress in the senior school that is good overall. Standardised measures indicate that progress has declined from 2012, where it was potentially high, to appropriate progress in 2014. The level of attainment at A level and available standardised measures of progress indicate that pupils make good overall progress in the sixth form.

- 3.7 In the junior school, the achievement of pupils with SEND is good, but sometimes their progress is hindered initially by delays in providing appropriate programmes of support. In the senior school, pupils with SEND are well catered for through learning support programmes, and they achieve in line with their peers, making good progress. Pupils with EAL achieve well because they receive additional, specialist support and they also make good progress. The most able usually make good progress through the support they receive within class.
- 3.8 Throughout the school, pupils' attitudes to learning are generally very positive. They are enthusiastic and well motivated, and they enjoy learning. They exhibit pride in their work, which is well organised, and they work effectively in groups or individually as required. Pupils at all stages show a willingness to take the initiative when encouraged to do so.

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

- 3.9 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is good.
- 3.10 In the EYFS, the educational programmes provide excellent coverage of all seven areas of the curriculum, with a well-considered balance of child-initiated and adult-led learning. Outdoor activities are an integral part of the daily experiences for Nursery children. However, the location of the Reception classroom means that opportunities for spontaneous outdoor learning are more limited for the older EYFS children as it is not possible for them to move freely between indoors and outside. Specialist teaching enhances the curriculum provision, with both the Nursery and Reception classes having weekly swimming lessons. Reception children were observed confidently entering the water and practising breaststroke skills. Although there are no extra-curricular activities available for EYFS children, a creative play session is offered at the end of each day. Rigorous planning ensures that the needs of all children are met effectively. Excellent and plentiful resources are used successfully to provide a wide range of active and exciting learning opportunities, which develop the children's creative and critical thinking, as well enabling them to consolidate their basic skills.
- 3.11 In other year groups the curriculum accurately reflects the aim of the school to enable all pupils to achieve their full potential by offering a wide range of subject options in a stimulating environment. This view was endorsed by the overwhelming majority of parents in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. Since the previous inspection, the junior school curriculum has been reviewed extensively,

with several beneficial changes being introduced, including a larger element of specialist teaching in areas such as science, modern foreign languages and design and technology. This has enabled pupils to be challenged more frequently in their work, and has led to more coherent planning between the junior and senior schools, as well as strengthening cross-curricular links. The recommendation of the previous inspection is therefore met.

- 3.12 Curricular planning within the senior school is effective. Creativity and practical skills are developed strongly within Years 7 to 9 through small-sized teaching groups, and drama is available as an optional subject in Year 9 and an extra-curricular activity. Religious education has a strong position within the junior years and with all pupils studying it through to GCSE, reflecting the Catholic ethos of the school. Constructive change since the previous inspection has enabled Year 7 pupils to study French or Spanish, with the opportunity to take a second language upon entering Year 9, where some pupils also take entry level Latin. Additionally, English and mathematics have moved to the IGCSE, thus adding extra rigour and challenge to the curriculum, and providing better preparation for A-level study. In some subjects, such as physical education, grouping pupils by ability enables rapid progress, including for the most able. Provision for pupils with SEND or EAL is good, with flexible application of the curriculum to meet the needs of the individual pupil enhanced through specialist support during the school day. Careful timetabling at GCSE and A level enables the subject preferences of almost all pupils to be met.
- 3.13 Since the previous inspection, provision at GCSE has been enhanced through the introduction of courses in the separate sciences, and in design and technology, with economics being added at A level. Provision for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) has been formalised within the curriculum, and there is a well-co-ordinated programme across all year groups in the senior school. The programme successfully incorporates consideration of British values, such as democracy and respect for the rule of law, including through presentations, assemblies and displays around the school. It is helpful in preparing pupils for life in British society. A balanced presentation of opposing views in the coverage of political issues is ensured, for example through the staging of mock elections, with potential candidates from Year 7 upwards. In addition, sixth-form pupils benefit from a variety of games options, a lecture programme, participation in community service and the opportunity to mentor younger pupils.
- 3.14 A comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities is available throughout the junior and senior schools. In the junior school, pupils select five different activities to attend each week, choosing from over thirty which are available through the course of the year. In the senior school, many pupils participate in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Enrichment and further challenge are provided through the opportunity to take part in competitions such as Rotary Youth Speaks, or to attend the McAuley Society, named after the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, consisting of talks on diverse topics such as freedom of speech and health in Ancient Greece.
- 3.15 Links with the local community are strong. Junior pupils visit local care homes and there is a very strong commitment to the local parish church, with pupils helping at lunches for the elderly. The school also participates annually in a diocesan mass at Portsmouth Cathedral. Regular local and overseas trips are organised, with biennial language exchanges to France and Spain. The school has received the International School Award for its work with a school in Uganda, for which pupils raise significant funds to sponsor children.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.16 The contribution of teaching is good.
- 3.17 The suitably qualified and highly committed EYFS staff know the children extremely well and understand their individual needs and interests. They are knowledgeable about how young children learn, set high expectations, and use ongoing daily observations and assessments to plan the next steps in each child's learning. This ensures that children make rapid progress and achieve at the highest level, in line with their capabilities and developmental stages. Staff offer sensitive support and challenge the children in their learning and development through carefully targeted questioning and problem-solving opportunities, and by exploiting cross-curricular links. They liaise with other colleagues routinely, sharing progress information and assessment data to ensure that the children are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- 3.18 A large majority of teaching in both the junior and senior schools fully supports the school's aims to enable all pupils to fulfil their potential and to develop independent thinking and a love of learning. A very large majority of pupils said in pre-inspection questionnaire responses that they feel they are making good progress, their teachers help them to learn and they are encouraged to work independently. Teaching across the school benefits from the strong subject knowledge and enthusiasm of staff, who relate well to pupils throughout and respect them as individuals; they willingly devote considerable time to providing additional help beyond the classroom. Teaching is unbiased and encourages tolerance and respect amongst pupils.
- 3.19 The best lessons are very well planned, benefiting from a clear understanding of the pupils' needs and employing a variety of suitable approaches, designed to provide appropriate levels of challenge. In the small minority of less successful lessons, teaching does not make the lesson aims clear and lacks challenge, variety and pace, leading to some restless behaviour amongst pupils. Time is usually managed well, but occasionally, within double lessons in the senior school, teaching does not sustain a rapid pace, and pupils lose focus.
- 3.20 A very small minority of parents expressed in response to the pre-inspection questionnaire a concern that the needs of the most able pupils are not met. Inspection found some examples of outstanding practice, showing that provision for the most able has improved since the previous inspection, but that it is not always strong. The previous recommendation has therefore been partially addressed. In most lessons, teaching successfully addresses the needs of pupils with SEND. Their requirements are assessed by specialist staff who give helpful guidance on how best to provide support within the classroom. In some cases, and as a consequence of carefully directed support, pupils with SEND, including those with EHC plans, were seen to make rapid progress. Progress is lower when targeted support is not identified or given sufficiently quickly. Pupils with EAL are assessed carefully upon entry to the school to determine the amount of additional support required; in the junior school this includes the very effective use of teaching assistants.
- 3.21 Teaching uses a variety of methods to enthuse pupils and to facilitate good progress. Different types of questioning are used effectively to probe and develop greater understanding, indicating a clear awareness of pupils' individual abilities. This approach results in thoughtful and well-considered responses from pupils, who

concentrate well and are very willing to contribute to the success of the lesson. Less effective questioning, which only involves a small number of the class, gives the pupils insufficient time to test their understanding. In many lessons, effective use is made of paired or group work to encourage independent thinking and exploration of ideas, and pupils are seen to enjoy taking more responsibility for their learning.

- 3.22 Resources are used effectively across the school. The libraries are attractive and well stocked, and teaching actively encourages pupils' usage of their research and study facilities. Teaching makes wide-ranging and confident use of ICT resources, which are a feature of almost all classrooms. Several of these are equipped with interactive whiteboards that are effectively utilised in some lessons, for example when pupils take charge to demonstrate their learning to others. Extensive use is made in the sixth form of ICT for independent research and for enhancing the presentation of work.
- 3.23 In the junior school, marking is conscientiously undertaken and includes encouraging comments, although it does not always suggest the ways forward for pupils. In the senior school, pupils' attainment is tracked regularly, with the data being made available to all staff. Teaching is also informed by the regular testing of pupils. The best marking is detailed and constructive, including clear targets for improvement which pupils find very helpful. A small minority of marking was seen to be more cursory and offer little or no direction for improvement. Overall, the quality of marking has improved in response to the recommendation of the previous inspection, but some elements remain to be addressed.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- 4.2 Within the EYFS, children's personal development is excellent. They behave extremely well at all times, taking turns and sharing without prompting from adults. Many examples of kindness were seen during the course of the inspection. Children are led in worship at appropriate times during the school day, and those in Reception have contributed to a class thanksgiving prayer. Staff have received appropriate training and understand their responsibilities in actively promoting British values, including tolerance and respect for others, with festivals from other faiths and cultural differences being explored. Individual milestones and successes are highlighted in assemblies and 'circle times', and children clearly delight in their own achievements and those of their peers. They are very well prepared for their transition within the setting and into the next stage in their education.
- 4.3 The spiritual development of pupils is good. While the school embraces all faiths, a strong Catholic ethos underpins school life. Although practising Catholics are not in the majority within the school, there is, from all pupils, a respect for and an empathy with the tenets of the Catholic faith. Assemblies and registration periods provide opportunities for pupils to engage in prayer, though the element of self-reflection is sometimes limited. A number of meaningful moments of quiet spirituality were observed, notably in the junior school, where pupils were seen to grow in self-knowledge as a consequence. Since the previous inspection, a chaplaincy co-ordinator has been appointed, and the life of the chapel has subsequently been enhanced, with the school reporting that a significant number of pupils voluntarily attend masses, or use the chapel for quiet contemplation.
- 4.4 The moral development of pupils is excellent. Pupils in all year groups have a keen sense of right and wrong, and understand the need for rules; in the junior school, pupils' responsibilities within the classroom are clearly posted. A junior 'eco' council and frequent reminders about the need for recycling highlight pupils' responsibility towards the environment. Pupils in the senior school show a deepening knowledge of the civil and criminal law of England, for example in their understanding of the role of magistrates and the judiciary. They are confident in expressing their views on human rights and moral issues, as well as listening to the views of others, for example on the subject of abortion. Pupils have a strong awareness of the needs of others and considerable sums of money are enthusiastically raised for a variety of charities, such as a local food bank, through events such as Help for Heroes in the junior school and a talent show in the senior school.
- 4.5 The social development of pupils is good. In the junior school, pupils' care for each other is strikingly apparent. The school's mission statement expresses the values of kindness, co-operation and care, and the overwhelming majority of pupils act accordingly, and are notable for their good manners and their considerate behaviour towards one another. Occasionally, within the senior school, a very small minority of pupils were seen not to follow the example of their peers. Pupils show leadership through taking up positions of responsibility on the school council, and through organising house assemblies and representing the school at open mornings. The significance of democracy is discussed by senior pupils, who are encouraged to engage in elections and thereby contribute actively towards its promotion. The school educates pupils strongly in the risks of radicalisation. As they move through

the school, the pupils develop a good knowledge of the public services and institutions of England, for example the monarchy, promoted through the PSHEE programme. Pupils at all stages show respect for other people and they understand the importance of identifying and combating discrimination.

- 4.6 Pupils' cultural development is good; there is a strong sense of tolerance, understanding and respect towards other cultures. Junior school pupils benefit from trips to museums and theatres which strengthen their appreciation and understanding of Western traditions, and contributions to classroom discussion by pupils from different backgrounds are highly valued. Cultural enrichment is not evident within the day-to-day experiences of senior school pupils, though they learn to appreciate other cultures through overseas trips, including, in recent years, visits to Uganda, Malta, Vietnam and France. Visiting speakers, including academics and authors, help to enhance the cultural awareness of the pupils, as do annual arts and reading weeks.
- 4.7 By the time pupils leave the junior school, they are articulate, well rounded and self-confident. They maintain those virtues as they progress through the senior school, emerging as socially aware young adults with high levels of self-esteem who are at ease with themselves.

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

- 4.8 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.9 The school is successful in providing a happy and purposeful environment, in line with its aims, and firmly rooted in Catholic principles and the aspiration to be a loving, caring and welcoming community.
- 4.10 Children within the EYFS develop strong relationships with all members of staff, with the key-person system promoting firm bonds and attachments. The small group sizes ensure that all children are extremely well cared for. The warm, welcoming, cheerful environment enables the children to have a positive and happy start to their school day, with the calm, well-organised classrooms encouraging good behaviour and co-operative play. Children are aware of the importance of eating a healthy diet and engaging in physical activities. A wide range of suitable food is available at lunchtimes and children are well supported in making their choices. The school provides healthy morning snacks, though some children choose to bring a snack from home. Children are independent in managing their hygiene and personal needs, staff supporting them sensitively when help is needed.
- 4.11 The school is highly successful in meeting its aim to be a community based on Catholic principles and respect for others. A strong and well-managed system of pastoral care is in place throughout, which creates an inclusive environment in which all pupils are looked after with care and compassion. Informal systems of communication are effective in supplementing the work of form tutors and house staff. In discussions and in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, pupils and parents praised the school as being a happy, safe environment, in which pupils feel well supported by the staff. Relationships between pupils and staff, and amongst pupils themselves, are excellent.
- 4.12 Good behaviour is underpinned by clear systems of rules and sanctions, both of which have been revised recently within the senior school. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, a minority of pupils in the senior school suggested that teachers are not fair in the way that they award sanctions and rewards. Inspection

evidence, including analysis of the school's records, did not support this claim, and in discussions pupils acknowledged the recent improvements to the school's systems in this area. A small minority of pupils in pre-inspection questionnaire responses raised concerns as to the school's management of bullying. In discussions pupils and parents suggested that incidents of bullying are rare, and that when bullying does occur it is dealt with sensitively and briskly. Inspectors found that the school has rigorous measures to guard against bullying, including cyber-bullying, confirmed by scrutiny of the school's records.

- 4.13 Healthy eating is promoted through the provision of nutritious food and a varied menu. Pupils throughout are encouraged to take regular exercise and there are extensive opportunities for this through the school's curricular and extra-curricular provision.
- 4.14 In their pre-inspection responses, a majority of pupils in the senior school and a very small minority in the junior school said that they felt their opinions are not valued. Inspection evidence showed that the school is effective in seeking pupils' views. Pupils confidently put forward items to be discussed at the school councils, and reasonable responses are made in a timely manner to the issues raised, with reporting back through form representatives.
- 4.15 The school has a suitable plan to improve educational access for pupils with SEND.

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

- 4.16 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is good.
- 4.17 High priority is given to the welfare, health and safety of children in the EYFS, and secure systems are in place to ensure the adherence to safeguarding procedures and safety routines. Children are well supervised at all times, with particular attention being given to movement around the building. Staff receive appropriate training in child protection, first aid and food hygiene, and they are aware of their duties in countering radicalisation and extremism. They have a keen sense of shared responsibility with regard to the welfare of the children. Children are well trained in safety routines, for example using scissors with skill and care. Detailed risk assessments are undertaken for both on- and off-site activities and these are regularly reviewed. Equipment is checked daily to ensure that it is clean and well maintained. Arrival and collection arrangements at the beginning and end of each day are safe, with opportunities for informal communication between staff and parents. Attendance is carefully monitored, with any unexplained absences being followed up in a timely manner.
- 4.18 The school has a clear understanding of its responsibilities with regard to safeguarding. The extensive policy has been updated recently to reflect current guidance, and it is reviewed regularly. However, its implementation has not always been fully rigorous in relation to pre-appointment medical checks for staff or other pre-appointment checks for governors, and historically these deficiencies of process had potential to undermine the promotion of pupils' welfare. A rigorous system is now in place, and all of the necessary checks upon current staff have been carried out and are appropriately recorded. Safeguarding training for all staff is thorough, relevant to their roles and updated regularly to encompass new imperatives, for example those relating to countering extremism. Strong links with local agencies have included a recent audit of safeguarding measures.

- 4.19 The school is very sensitive to the needs of individual pupils, and these are communicated clearly to staff. Within the senior school, a weekly bulletin is helpful in formalising any additional measures to support the welfare of specific pupils. Health and safety matters are considered by a number of groups within the school, and these are constructive in identifying issues for consideration and actions to be taken.
- 4.20 The school has highly effective measures to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards. There are regular tests of equipment, with emergency evacuation practices taking place at least termly. Thorough risk assessments for activities both on and off the school premises are undertaken, with specialist advice available where required. The school site is largely well maintained. However, some areas within the senior school, such as the cloakrooms and toilets, are less well maintained.
- 4.21 The first-aid policy is thorough, and the medical centres provide effective support for pupils who are sick or injured, and for those with SEND who require it. Many staff assist in the care of pupils through their first-aid training, and sufficient staff within the EYFS have received paediatric first-aid training to ensure that statutory requirements are met at all times.
- 4.22 Admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained and stored for the required three-year period.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is good.
- 5.2 Governance is well informed about the EYFS through staff presentations and by termly reports from the head of the junior school. There is currently no governor with a specific responsibility for the EYFS.
- 5.3 The board provides strong oversight of the school's work, and of the challenges which it faces. Detailed reports from senior leadership in both the junior and senior schools, and from the various governors' sub-committees, ensure that governance has an accurate insight into the working of the school. Through frequent discussion, leading to consensus, governance and senior leadership have arrived at agreed priorities for future development, with the regular review and evaluation of progress also applied directly to the work of senior leadership. Governance is highly effective in meetings its responsibilities for financial planning and the investment in staffing, accommodation and learning resources. Academic oversight is enhanced through the work of the education committee, with valuable input from governors with a professional background in schools. Additionally, governors visits classes to familiarise themselves with the day-to-day operation of the school, as well as attending school events.
- 5.4 The extensive safeguarding policy is reviewed thoroughly by the governing body on an annual basis, with a board member having recently taken on a specific role for safeguarding. However, there have been failures in the past to oversee the implementation of the school's recruitment procedures with sufficient rigour, including ensuring that all governors have had the appropriate clearance before assuming their roles.
- 5.5 Health and safety matters are monitored effectively through a sub-committee that also responds to issues raised through other groups in the school. Induction training is helpful in providing new members of the board with a clear understanding of their role, and some governors also undertake additional training. Overall, governance is highly successful in providing both support and challenge for the school.

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

- 5.6 The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians, is good.
- 5.7 The EYFS is well led and managed. Senior managers are aware of their responsibilities in ensuring that all aspects of the EYFS provision meet with regulatory requirements. Effective systems are in place to monitor the safeguarding and well-being of the children, with all EYFS staff receiving appropriate training as part of their induction programme. Equality, diversity and British values are actively promoted throughout the EYFS. Reflective practice leads to honest and effective self-evaluation that promotes the continuous development and enrichment of the educational programmes and provision. The recommendation from the previous inspection to further develop the outdoor education for children in the EYFS has been met as far as possible, given the constraints of the location of the Reception classroom. Another recommendation, to improve the surface immediately outside the Nursery class, has been addressed. All staff are encouraged to extend their professional knowledge through in-house training and attendance at local authority and other external courses. Well-established professional supervisory meetings and appraisal systems offer further valuable support to all EYFS staff. Parents receive written reports in the autumn and summer terms, informing them of their children's progress. These include details of achievements in all areas of the EYFS curriculum, as well as encouraging comments from the leadership. Additionally, parents have the opportunity to meet with their children's teacher in the spring term. Online learning journals provide parents with further information about the day-to-day experiences of their children, with the opportunity to respond, thereby involving them in their children's education. Should it be necessary, support from outside agencies such as the local authority is sought, in partnership with parents, for any children with SEND or EAL.
- 5.8 The committed senior leadership is largely successful in achieving the school's aims, which are based on the founding principles of the school and seek to promote a broad, academically focused education for all pupils in a caring and supportive environment. The means of achieving this ambitious aspiration are detailed in a comprehensive and challenging five-year strategic plan, which demonstrates the leadership's commitment to raising standards.
- 5.9 Since the previous inspection there have been significant changes to the structure of the senior school leadership team, and the consequential benefits of this, though already apparent, are not yet fully implemented. The restructuring has, however, already brought greater clarity to the organisation of the school, and helped to increase the accessibility of management to staff, pupils and parents. The work of senior leadership within the junior school is not distributed widely, so that nearly all related management functions fall to a small number of people. As a consequence, communication and whole-school planning are largely informal and the monitoring of some systems lacks sufficient rigour, sometimes leading to a lack of effective tracking of pupils' progress.
- 5.10 The school has a comprehensive and detailed development plan that states clearly the school's priorities and the steps to be taken to improve the educational provision. It is used as the basis for academic departmental planning and ensures that the senior school has a coherent approach to development. There is good communication between senior leadership and middle management, with clear

annual targets being set, largely relating to academic outcomes. Detailed annual reviews provide helpful opportunities for departments to evaluate their own progress. Overall, monitoring of the performance of departments is strong. Heads of department and year tutors, the pastoral leaders within the school, meet termly to assess the progress of pupils, and this provides a high standard of academic and pastoral support.

- 5.11 Since the previous inspection there has been a greater emphasis on academic results and ensuring that all pupils make good progress relative to their starting points. Developing the quality of teaching and of pupils' learning is a high priority and a small group has been formed to share current good practice. An initiative has seen each member of the senior leadership team being linked to a number of departments, with regular meetings and lesson observations taking place.
- 5.12 In the junior school all staff are appraised annually by the leadership, leading to the setting of clear professional targets and providing a helpful opportunity for self-reflection. Heads of department in the senior school conduct thorough annual appraisals of their staff, resulting in clear targets that are linked to priorities within development plans. The targets are used to inform the school's comprehensive and well-funded programme of professional development. All staff are trained in safeguarding and they understand their responsibilities for ensuring the welfare, health and safety of pupils.
- 5.13 The school appoints teaching and support staff of a high quality, and there is close collaboration between these groups, with support staff playing an integral part in the school's success. Pre-employment checks are now carried out rigorously and according to the school's recruitment policy, although there was a failure in the past to ensure that all medical checks were received before staff took up post, and that all governors had had the necessary checks before they took up their role. The monitoring of the work of cleaning staff within the senior school has been weak, so that there has been a failure to ensure a uniformly high standard of cleanliness.
- 5.14 Leadership strongly promotes values that encourage respect for others, and a democratic approach is clearly evident within the ethos of the school, for example in the ways in which the views of the school council and prefects are discussed by the senior leadership team.
- 5.15 Across the school very strong links are maintained with parents, carers and guardians. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents were extremely positive in their comments regarding many aspects of the school's provision. A very small minority of parents expressed dissatisfaction about the information they receive about their children's progress and the way in which the school handles any concerns they may have. Inspection evidence showed that parents receive written reports on their children's progress biannually, and that annual parents' evenings are held. Furthermore, information on progress and achievements is sent to parents of pupils in the senior school at regular intervals. At all stages in the school, reports are informative and include helpful suggestions for improvement, together with grades for effort and attainment in the senior school. Parents are encouraged to communicate with staff at any time, should they have queries or concerns. Additionally, inspection evidence, including study of school documentation and discussions with parents of both junior and senior school pupils, showed that, should a parent have a concern, it is handled with care and in accordance with the school's published policy.

- 5.16 Before their children join the school, parents receive helpful and detailed information, with several opportunities being provided to visit, thus promoting a smooth start to pupils' schooling. Parents of new pupils are made to feel welcome through social events arranged by the parents' association. Information about the curriculum and pupils' school experiences is provided through parents' meetings and workshops, and through email messages sent at the beginning of each term. The principal's weekly blog appears on the school's website and includes reflections on topical issues. Additionally, a weekly newsletter, giving details of significant forthcoming events and news of pupils' achievements, further enhances communication with parents.
- 5.17 Parents take advantage of the many opportunities to be actively involved with the work and progress of their children. In the junior school they support a range of clubs within the extra-curricular programme and help on trips and visits. Parents of senior school pupils act as mentors in the Young Enterprise programme, contribute to the McAuley Society and provide guidance as part of the school's careers programme.
- 5.18 The active parents' association has recently been reorganised to promote the involvement of parents of pupils across both the junior and senior schools. Social and fund-raising events are organised so that parents have many opportunities to be involved with school life, including, at the time of the inspection, preparing for the Christmas Fair. Additionally, parents are welcomed to sporting fixtures, concerts and plays, as well as to assemblies and church services. A parents' prayer group meets on a half-termly basis to support the spiritual life of the school.

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