

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### Ripley Court School

Full Name of the School	<b>Ripley Court School</b>
DCSF Number	<b>936/6307</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>312084</b>
Address	<b>Rose Lane, Ripley, Surrey GU23 6NE.</b>
Telephone Number	<b>01483 225217</b>
Fax Number	<b>01483 223854</b>
Email Address	<b>info@ripleycourt.co.uk</b>
Headmaster	<b>Mr Andrew Gough</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Colin Holloway</b>
Age Range	<b>3 to 13</b>
Gender	<b>Mixed</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> February 2008</b>

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005 and May 2007.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **Characteristics of the School**

- 1.1 Ripley Court is an independent day school for boys and girls aged from 3 to 13 years, set in twenty rural acres of Surrey countryside based round an adapted historic building. Founded as a boys' boarding school in 1893, it became a charitable educational trust in 1969 and has been co-educational since 1979. Boarding ceased in 1998. The present headmaster was appointed in April 2001.
- 1.2 The school aims to be a centre for the highest academic standards and develop academic breadth and depth in its pupils, emphasising literacy and mathematical development, the acquisition of linguistic skills from an early age and a general introduction to historical, scientific, geographical and artistic concepts. It also aims to develop the values of courtesy, enthusiasm, humour, determination, flexibility and integrity in its pupils.
- 1.3 About a third of the pupils are girls. The school is organised into: Nursery and Little Court - for pupils aged from 3 to 7 years (Nursery to Years 2), middle school for Years 3 to 5 and upper school for Years 6 to 8. Currently, 246 pupils are on the school roll of whom 40 are under the age of 5. Most pupils join at age 3 or 4, assigned to the appropriate age group in the Foundation Stage, in either the Nursery, Transition (for older Nursery pupils), or Reception class. Some may enter later, from local pre-preparatory schools at the age of 7, if places are available.
- 1.4 The majority of pupils come from families in the professions, residing within the area around Guildford and Woking. Entry into the Nursery and Transition is not dependent on ability, but pupils aged five years and above have a general assessment during a day's visit and older prospective pupils are given tests before being offered a place, if available. Though a wide range of ability is represented in the school, the ability profile of the school is above the national average.
- 1.5 No pupil has a statement of special educational need (SEN), but the school has identified 26 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Very few pupils have English as an additional language (EAL) or come from an ethnic minority background.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report and by the school to indicate year groups.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

### **The Educational Experience Provided**

- 2.1 Ripley Court provides a good educational experience for all its pupils. This improves the quality noted at the time of the last inspection, due, mainly, to its progress on the recommendations raised at that time. Pupils' courtesy, enthusiasm and humour greet the visitor immediately. These key attributes are promoted in the school's aims.
- 2.2 The friendly working atmosphere that pervades all sections of the school is the direct result of provision that is focused firmly on those of the aims related to developing pupils' personal qualities. In attempting to meet the challenging academic aims, to be 'a centre for the highest academic standards', staff fully promote the gradual build-up of skills and the development of breadth and depth. As a result, pupils acquire increasing confidence and are enabled to fulfil their personal potential. The provision of specialist rooms for some subjects, a development since the last inspection, enhances the facilities, presenting a good backdrop for subject-specific display and location of resources to stimulate learning.
- 2.3 A good, broad curriculum operates throughout the school. The provision in Nursery and Little Court fully covers the Early Learning Goals expected for children to achieve by the age of five. French is included, taught, like some of the physical development and music, by subject specialists. As soon as the children are ready, they embark on the National Curriculum. Sport is especially well provided for at all levels and increases further as pupils move into Middle school at the end of Year 2. Every pupil from Year 3 represents the school in at least one competitive team match each term.
- 2.4 Once pupils reach Year 5, the full curriculum is taught by specialists, rather than the class teacher, and the study of Latin begins. In the final two years, the requirements of Common Entrance (CE) lead the curriculum taught, and Greek is offered in Year 8. These additional linguistic experiences support an already strong feature of the provision and involve abundant opportunities for developing speaking and listening skills in a broad variety of contexts, and in a number of languages. Literacy skills emerge well throughout the curriculum; for instance in the provision for humanities. In a Year 1 religious education (RE) lesson, pupils showed understanding of the relationship between sounds and letters in undertaking a sustained piece of writing about Moses.
- 2.5 Opportunities to develop a range of mathematical understanding are provided, though investigative work and problem solving are limited overall. Numeracy skills are also used in other subjects from an early age, for instance in the dance activity for Little Court, when pupils count in time to the music. Scientific provision is plentiful, and information and communication technology (ICT) enjoys increased provision, compared with the opportunities available at the time of the last inspection. Some design and technology is now included in the curriculum, though not as a separate subject, except in Little Court. Creative education benefits from dedicated rooms that are well resourced.
- 2.6 The programme of personal social and health education (PSHE) supports the school's aims to develop personal qualities in its pupils. It includes some elements of citizenship appropriate to pupils' ages and provides coverage of each aspect. It is incorporated within other subjects of the curriculum for pupils up to the end of Year 1.
- 2.7 Extra-curricular activities are extensive and include board games, drama, judo, and a sudoku activity. Residential trips, visits and speakers, extend pupils' experiences and opportunities.

- 2.8 Preparation for the next stage starts early. The Nursery information booklet is a good induction tool that assists parents to prepare their children for starting school. The largely informal communication between staff works well to smooth the path for pupils as they move up the school because it means their needs are known. The broad curriculum provides good preparation for the next stage and for the world beyond school. In the final year, headteachers or pastoral leaders of the senior schools come into school to talk with pupils.
- 2.9 The curriculum is planned to develop and extend skills and knowledge, and activities and opportunities are open to all pupils. The schemes of work and policy documents are satisfactory and are revised periodically by subject leaders. The best schemes explain clearly the very things the less effective ones omit, or allude to only briefly: they state how tasks will differ according to ability, they include precise learning objectives that are not merely a list of activities to be undertaken, and they pay attention to good use of resources and adherence to relevant whole school policies, such as the marking policy.
- 2.10 The arrangements for those with differing needs, for instance those in need of additional support and those who the school has identified as gifted or talented, have improved considerably since the last inspection. Very few pupils have EAL and all are fluent speakers with no need for language support. Planning for the under 5s now includes reference to how activities are adapted for children with special needs and extended for more able children. An SEN co-ordinator has been appointed and is a member of the senior management team; effective individual education plans for pupils needing learning support are provided and reviewed regularly, and good links now exist with outside agencies. The needs of the gifted and talented are included in the responsibilities of the head of development; advice for planning for their needs is consistent and clear and improved since the last inspection. Though some of the subject planning does not make specific reference to how differing needs will be dealt with, in practice effective attention is given to individual need. 'The best thing about Ripley Court is the teachers, because they understand about my dyslexia,' was a comment made about the good provision.
- 2.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

### **Pupils' Learning and Achievements**

- 2.12 Pupils achieve good standards in relation to their abilities assisted by their perseverance and enthusiasm for their studies, and their often exemplary behaviour. This improves on the position at the last inspection. Pupils achieve well, too, in a range of sporting and extra-curricular activities. They learn together with mutual encouragement and respect. Most are well motivated, self-confident learners who reflect good personal development in their attitudes to learning, meeting this aspect of the school's aims well.
- 2.13 Thinking skills develop although few opportunities are presented. Many pupils display some creative thinking and understanding, however. For example in Years 5 and 6 science, pupils' work showed they had thought carefully about their creative presentations about the human body and used a variety of media. In lessons, pupils show enthusiasm and a feel for inquisitiveness. They use the knowledge thus gained in exploring further new ground, so they leave the school with strong foundations.
- 2.14 High standards of numeracy and literacy are reached throughout the school. Pupils soon become articulate, and by Year 4 can express themselves succinctly, reporting their views on school life. In Year 6 geography, pupils discussed ecosystems and reported to the rest of the group with fluency and coherence. They are good at listening, to their teachers and to each other, for example in science in small group work, where Year 8 pupils paid close attention to their teachers and their peers' explanations of electrical circuitry. They use their well-

developed reading skills in a variety of contexts, though not enough opportunity occurs for them to use the library for independent enquiry. Their writing begins in the Nursery where children show delight in the results of their mark-making activities. They learn to write in a cursive style from an early age and this assists fluency. By the time they reach their final year many can write confidently in a variety of styles, though opportunities to write independently and make their own notes are limited overall.

- 2.15 Pupils apply their numeracy skills well both in mathematics lessons and elsewhere. In geography, for example, mathematical data are regularly used to annotate and extrapolate weather data. An excellent example of ICT skills being used to support learning in other subjects was evident in the science investigation displays featuring electronic data, though pupils say they do not have many opportunities in other curriculum areas to use computers at school to find things out for themselves.
- 2.16 All pupils achieve well compared with their ability levels across almost the entire curriculum, though this varies a little depending on the expectations of the teaching. However, there are no significant differences in attainment between different groups of pupils, subjects or curriculum areas, and support provided for pupils at all levels encourages them to make progress.
- 2.17 National tests are not taken. Other standardised measures show achievement and progress which is good in relation to ability. CE examination results are good overall and pupils almost always achieve a place at the school selected to suit their talents and abilities. By the end of the Foundation Stage children are well onto National Curriculum work and show knowledge of sounds, matched by their handwriting skill, that is well above the point expected for their age. By the age of 7 most pupils are quick to calculate mental arithmetic exercises involving adding and subtracting numbers to 20, and can devise strategies to solve problems with larger numbers. In literacy at that age they can complete sustained pieces of writing, for instance writing formal and informal letters, and writing poetry, and their standard of reading is high. By Year 6 and in the final years, standards remain high.
- 2.18 Pupils and teams often achieve well in individual and group competition such as in music and drama. The sports teams, which include all pupils from the age of 7, compete against other schools. Their success, and individual success that includes county places in cricket and football, is testament to the high standards achieved and the strong personal qualities pupils show.
- 2.19 Great pride is taken to present work as neatly as possible, and pupils take meticulous care to organise their work well. Year 8 produced beautifully presented work on the tsunami. Pupils are very good at working with each other. In Nursery, children played co-operatively and imaginatively in the home corner, dressing up as a bear and a police officer. Whether getting ready for a particular activity or working in small groups to prepare for a performance, for instance in a Little Court dance group practice for *Greased Lightning*, they collaborate extremely well with each other, completing tasks with a minimum of fuss.
- 2.20 Lessons start promptly and pupils arrive and prepare for a lesson clearly expecting to settle and to learn. Concentration levels are high. Pupils persevere; for instance children in Reception created books on *Jack and Jill*, sequencing pictures and annotating the story, fully absorbed in their work. Most pupils derive considerable enjoyment from their work and activities.

## **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils**

- 2.21 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. The supportive quality of relationships at all levels within the community impacts positively and maintains the good development reported at the last inspection, meeting the aims of the school.
- 2.22 Pupils develop well spiritually. In Reception, delight was overwhelming and noisy when a child achieved success in ‘alphabet bingo’. They show self-esteem as well as increasing self-knowledge, whatever their cultural and religious background. Pupils happily interact with staff, showing confidence by asking questions. Many pupils enter speech and drama examinations, giving them the chance to perform and develop further their self-esteem and confidence. Pupils have good opportunities to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and identify targets for personal development, so developing self-knowledge. The school is highly successful in enabling its pupils to reflect on the meaning and purpose of life, commensurate with their age, in a context that clearly respects the beliefs and opinions of others. Religious education lessons reinforce this development strongly, including the exploration of the way values and beliefs affect peoples’ lives; for example in a Year 7 RE lesson, pupils considered the effect of being a Buddhist monk. Assemblies during the inspection demonstrated how self-assured pupils are and how well developed is their spiritual development.
- 2.23 Moral development is good. Pupils clearly know the difference between right and wrong. Their very good understanding of moral issues and respect for the law are carefully nurtured throughout the school. For example, fire safety officers and police officers hold regular talks about their responsibilities in the wider world. In interviews, pupils said they are well aware of the school rules; they respect them and understand that they exist for the benefit of the school community. The youngest pupils know it is wrong to push and know it is right to say ‘Excuse me, please’. In some year groups, class rules are suggested and verified by the whole class. By being involved in raising money for charities, such as national children’s charities, pupils clearly demonstrate well-developed understanding of their obligations to those who are less fortunate than themselves.
- 2.24 Good social development is the result of the many good opportunities provided for pupils to learn to play their part in the community. Pupils respond well to the many opportunities to take responsibility such as showing parents round on open days, as well as to opportunities to be prefects, head boy, and team captains. The house system gives further opportunity for pupils to take responsibility. The PSHE programme is one means through which they discuss matters concerning school life and the community with their teacher and each other, developing their understanding and awareness. A Year 7 class recently led an assembly, much enjoyed by participants and listeners, on the subject of drugs, demonstrating their knowledge of this topic and its social effects.
- 2.25 Elements of citizenship are included through several subjects, including PSHE, history and geography, and pupils are aware of how local councils operate. A number of pupils in interviews suggested they would enjoy being part of a school council, and showed some understanding of this aspect of community life. A recent trip to see King Arthur’s round table was undertaken by Year 8, setting the elements of fairness and democracy in an historical context. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have a planned visit to the war graves in France as a cross-curricular event. These carefully chosen visits contribute effectively to their understanding of how society functions.
- 2.26 Cultural development is good. Pupils learn about many festivals such as Diwali and Chinese New Year. Year 2 has studied food from around the world and Year 8 has visited a Buddhist temple and other places of worship. Due regard is placed on developing good understanding

of the cultural heritage of Western Europe as well as further afield. For instance, the study of poetry and art from various periods and from various cultures is included, and pupils show, in their work, their developing knowledge and awareness resulting from these studies. Pupils much enjoyed learning country dancing and Maypole dancing and this has given them an insight into British traditions. All these experiences support pupils' developing understanding of their own and other cultures, and they are also beginning to develop their awareness of the diversity of the community that is Britain today.

- 2.27 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

### **The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)**

- 2.28 Teaching is good overall, and the progress pupils make is now assessed regularly and effectively, with increasing use made of the results. This improves on the position at the time of the last inspection and supports the school's aim for academic breadth, contributing to the improvement in pupils' achievement.
- 2.29 Teachers' awareness of those in need of additional help has strengthened considerably since the last inspection, and this has contributed to the better progress made and higher standards achieved by these pupils. They respond well to pupils' needs, enabling the acquisition of new knowledge. This was demonstrated very well in a Year 8 RE lesson, when work was matched carefully to ability level in a lesson on the ordination of women priests.
- 2.30 Teaching encourages and inspires effort, helped by pupils' good attitudes to learning. Some independent learning is promoted, most often in science, at all levels, where many exciting opportunities are provided for investigative learning. Overall, however, teachers provide limited opportunities for pupils to use and develop their thinking skills. This is particularly the case in lessons for the older pupils, where teaching, generally, relies on an overly-directed method, in the preparation for CE. In physical activities observed, pupils are highly motivated and respond positively to the high expectations of the teachers.
- 2.31 Teachers expect pupils to behave responsibly and to work hard, and give them every encouragement to do so. Such expectations are fulfilled, creating a very positive and enthusiastic learning environment in which pupils flourish. Pupils said, 'We love this school. We wouldn't change a thing!' Lesson plans are generally suitable and deal with different needs effectively: an improvement since the last inspection. In the best, learning objectives are well planned and clearly stated, with useful references to prior learning and next steps.
- 2.32 In the best lessons, the pace is brisk and tasks vary according to the needs of the teaching groups, as in a Reception lesson in literacy where children contributed individually to the range of tasks identifying rhyming words with vigorous enthusiasm. In another lively example, a Year 5 French lesson, the presentation of grammar included a variety of teaching methods that enthused the pupils and made the work exciting.
- 2.33 Teaching is adapted well to meet the particular needs of individual pupils. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson, the teaching showed perceptive understanding of individual needs and guided pupils very well. Staff training to support those with learning needs has been undertaken, and procedures now include comprehensive individual education plans. Teachers' own knowledge of their subject is often very good and this enables staff to present learning with real understanding, so that they can respond very well to pupils' questions.

- 2.34 The quality of resources is good. Teaching now makes more use of technology, with the introduction of interactive white boards and ICT being used increasingly to support learning. However, ICT is not well used for research in the school. The library is a useful facility that is beginning to be used effectively to promote and support learning, but little use is yet made of the attractive area for book-based research. The specialist rooms that have been designated work well to support pupils' learning experiences, as displays have been mounted that stimulate subject learning and set the scene for enthusiastic activity in the room. Pupils are encouraged to succeed because they know their success will be celebrated by mounting the results for everyone to admire.
- 2.35 Teachers use the outside environment in Nursery and Little Court very well to develop pupils' learning by ensuring open access to a variety of activities. Other outside areas, used by older pupils, are well resourced and used frequently to support learning, for instance in sport, science and geography.
- 2.36 In most subjects, pupils' work is regularly and consistently marked according to the school's marking policy, which is clear and suitable, and contained, with other policies, in the staff handbook. Marking is often carried out well; it is positive and supportive and points the way forward. As is appropriate for younger pupils, marking is often immediate and oral and examples of constructive oral marking were observed. Positive feedback is the norm at all levels and pupils respond well to such encouragement.
- 2.37 A significant improvement in performance evaluation has taken place in response to the recommendation of the last inspection, that the school should develop a whole-school assessment and recording policy. The process now in place is comprehensive. In the Foundation Stage, formal observations are used effectively, involving colour-coded labels, to aid planning for further progress. For other year groups, academic assessment information is recorded carefully, but its use to plan next steps and facilitate best progress for each individual is at an early stage for most subjects. In several year groups, pupils decide their own targets and assess their progress themselves, though most of the targets devised in this way are personal rather than academic, such as 'concentrate for longer' or listen more'. This means that, although useful for personal development which is a priority of the school's aims, they are not so useful for providing pupils and their teachers with important reference points for monitoring under-achievement and predicting future attainment. CE results are carefully checked by the headmaster. This forms a useful indicator of strengths and areas for improvement in teaching.
- 2.38 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

### **3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils**

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care and of welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory overall, maintaining the quality of provision noted in the last inspection. Within that, the care that staff devote to the well-being of their pupils is good. This is because staff know their pupils very well, and positive relationships which promote effective learning and a caring atmosphere prevail. This assists the school in developing the values of enthusiasm, humour, and integrity in its pupils, fulfilling its aims.
- 3.2 Pupils feel well supported in and out of the classroom and say that they are treated fairly. In interviews, they reported that if they had a problem regarding work or friends, they would feel able to talk to their form tutor or another member of staff. Comments included, 'I know I can trust my teachers to help me with my problems'. Form tutors offer particularly high-quality support and guidance and are assisted by good policies and procedures to secure the well being of pupils. Many of the arrangements are informal, and this often works well. The 'orange card' system is a useful record of minor incidents that occur in lessons.
- 3.3 The form system is complemented by the house system – each pupil from Year 3 is assigned to a house and attends the weekly house meetings. The house system is used effectively to promote competition and high achievement, and house points are eagerly accumulated and celebrated within the house. The staff handbook offers guidance on the pastoral role and teachers are well supported by the management structure in fulfilling this part of their function. Respect is a byword in the school, among staff and pupils alike. The positive relationships, between staff and pupils, and among pupils, contribute to the caring ethos that pervades the school, and they are based on mutual trust and consideration. On being asked, 'What is special about your school?' comments included 'The teachers.'
- 3.4 Pupils are familiar with school procedures and clear about what they should do if they have concerns. Measures to promote responsible behaviour are clear and balanced. Pupils know and understand the system of stripes for misdemeanours. They respond very well indeed to various reward methods. They especially like the use of badges as medals of achievement; for instance, the times table badges are worn with considerable pride. The headmaster's commendation badges are perhaps the most coveted reward, being won only after much endeavour.
- 3.5 A suitable anti-bullying policy is in place and staff and parents are given clear guidance. Parents and pupils say that bullying rarely occurs, though older pupils say it did sometimes happen, but that it was dealt with effectively, and occurs less, now. The new detail in the anti-bullying policy gives thorough and clear guidance to staff and parents with a view to eliminating such behaviours.
- 3.6 The head of development acts as child protection officer and training is up to date. Appropriate procedures for child protection are described in the child protection policy, and training has been undertaken by all staff including domestic, maintenance and catering staff. A governor is designated as child protection liaison officer, so lines of responsibility are clear.
- 3.7 The school has due regard to ensuring the safety of its pupils by minimising the risk of fire. Regular fire drills are carefully recorded. A new whole-school fire alarm system has recently been installed and this triggered the useful, complete analysis of fire risk across the site. Arrangements for the minimising of risk from other hazards are carried out appropriately,

and some arrangements are good in their detail, for instance the risk assessments prior to trips and visits. The latest environmental health inspection was carried out in December 2006. Most of its recommendations were dealt with by relocating to a new dining facility. Records show that others, such as the checking of temperatures, have also been instigated. Most of the arrangements to ensure health and safety on site and off are suitable. However, several minor issues of health and safety were raised with the school.

- 3.8 Copies of medical records are readily available to authorised persons, to assure effective awareness. First aid boxes are located around the school, and on the playing fields, and many staff are trained in first aid, six of them to the higher level. Arrangements are in place for pupils who are ill during the course of the day and include, if necessary, the use of suitable facilities. Proper regard is paid to statutory requirements in the case of disability access plans and special educational needs, complying with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. Admissions and attendance registers are completed accurately and arrangements are in place to follow up unexplained absence promptly.
- 3.9 Pupils' awareness of health and safety issues is high. They are encouraged to develop healthy eating habits, for instance through PSHE lessons and other subjects, and in the presentation of a variety of healthy foods in the school dining room. Plenty of opportunity is provided for them to take part in physical education and exercise, indoors and out. This is well supported by the sports staff and much encouragement is given to pupils to participate, which they do with much enjoyment.
- 3.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

### **The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community**

- 3.11 The school has established good, warm and supportive links with the parents and the community, maintaining the quality identified at the time of the last inspection and assisting in meeting its aims. As a result, most parents are highly satisfied with the education and support provided for their children.
- 3.12 A large number of responses were received to the parents' pre-inspection questionnaire. Almost all strongly supported the school's work in terms of the range of subjects offered and the worthwhile attitudes and values promoted. Little concern was expressed about any aspect of provision. A few parents think that the information about, and opportunities to discuss, progress are too little, and that the school doesn't handle their concerns well enough. Inspectors examined each of these issues and found them unsubstantiated. Teachers readily discussed progress of children during collection with parents of pupils in Little Court.
- 3.13 Appropriate opportunities exist for parents to be involved in school life. From the start, in the Nursery class, parents come into school to talk to the children about their working life. The school positively encourages parents to be involved in the work and progress of their children, for instance by welcoming support at school events, concerts and matches and encouraging activity through the parents' association. Parents help out backstage at drama productions, and occasionally assist with reading. In Little Court, every class has a daily comment book in which parents may write. All pupils up to and including Year 4 have a reading record that provides a useful liaison between home and school. Older pupils have a prep diary that can be used in a similar manner.

- 3.14 The school provides parents with a good level of information displayed on notice boards around the school, and regular newsletters. The web site is excellent, being very informative and regularly updated. Parents are provided with a comprehensive picture of their children's work and progress through termly written reports and an annual discussion evening. Years 3 to 8 pupils are also given half-termly grades on performance and effort that are sent home, to keep parents informed. Staff, including the headmaster, are accessible to parents daily. A formal complaints procedure is in place which is comprehensive and readily available for parents, and any concerns are handled with due care.
- 3.15 The school has good, varied links with the local community and regularly involves a range of local groups in its life. Its facilities are used by the local youth club, the local under-16 football team and the local scout troop. The school's swimming pool and gymnasium are also enjoyed by outside groups. The two-way relationship with the local church is strong because the school uses the church for some services, and clergy come into school to celebrate religious events, such as harvest festival. Charitable giving forms an important regular link with the community and often involves giving to local children's charities, such as a local charity that cares for children with disabilities. Many visits into school, for instance by drama groups, and visits out of school, for instance to museums and local places of interest, support and enrich pupils' education.
- 3.16 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

## **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 Governance is good and makes a valuable contribution to the work of the school to achieve its aims and improvement since the last inspection has been significant. Governors cover a broad and useful range of experience and expertise: for instance the chairman is a retired headteacher.
- 4.2 The school is a charitable trust and a company limited by guarantee. The structure in place supports the effective oversight of the school. Three sub-committees share responsibilities well and cover finance and general purposes, health and safety and buildings. Members offer a good range of expertise and include a doctor, who oversees health and child protection, and a surveyor, who oversees safety and maintenance.
- 4.3 Governors are appropriately involved in educational development and financial planning and have a clear, well-documented view of the needs regarding buildings as well as educational provision. Their composition, as local professionals, assists them in understanding the values pertinent to the school and the local community, and in identifying and supporting appropriate development. The reporting arrangements, which include staff presenting information to governors, means that governors are very well informed about the school and that has led to the development of positive and constructive relationships with staff. Formal arrangements in place for regular meetings with senior staff enable governors, through the headmaster, to provide appropriate support and advice.
- 4.4 Governors are aware of the minor health and safety issues noted during the inspection. Specifically defined roles, recently allocated, assist them in discharging their responsibilities for child protection, health and safety, and risk, through skilled professionals, and help assure pupils' welfare.

### **The Quality of Leadership and Management**

- 4.5 Leadership and management are good overall, an improvement since the last inspection, and are focused on the fulfilment of the school's aims, for which they achieve particular success with regard to the personal development of the pupils. Progress on the recommendations of the previous inspections, including the most recent Nursery inspection, has been good, and the school has identified appropriate key areas for development.
- 4.6 Clear direction and leadership are provided by the headmaster and the senior team. Their work is reflected in the high standards pupils achieve, the high standard of care provided and the happy and lively ethos that pervades the school. The internal management structure is clear. It operates efficiently to support the fulfilment of the school's aims. Job descriptions are precise and comprehensive and form a strong basis to support pupils' learning and progress, though roles in the Foundation Stage are less clear.
- 4.7 The school has an extensive five-year development plan, currently in draft form, the result of comprehensive staff and governing body consultation. A great many useful points are identified, but the school is aware that the number of points in the plan and the range of dates by which action is required cloud clarity. The school is also aware that the priorities of the subject development plans are not linked clearly enough to whole school issues.

- 4.8 School policies, the result of a thorough and regular process of consultation and review, cover appropriate areas of school life. Efficient timings for further regular review are indicated. Some policies lack sufficient precision for clear understanding of procedures that are to be followed by staff, for instance the policy with regard to pupils' equal opportunities.
- 4.9 A system of performance management is in operation that provides for an annual review of work and the identification of individual targets and training needs for the coming year, though these are not yet related to the whole school development plan. Monitoring of teaching and learning is the responsibility of the director of studies and the heads of department. The system is effective and thorough and involves work scrutiny, observation of lessons and checking the schemes of work.
- 4.10 Suitable procedures and records to ensure safe recruitment are in place. All statutory checks are made prior to confirmation of appointment, including those with the Criminal Records Bureau. The induction procedure for new staff is supportive. The level of support for newly-qualified teachers is high and their induction arrangements satisfy the procedures to allow them to achieve fully qualified status. Classroom assistants are deployed very well to assist pupils' progress. Maintenance staff are sufficient to provide the required service to the school. Catering is outsourced and offers a good service.
- 4.11 The arrangements for providing appropriate resources, including much-improved ICT resources, ensure that pupils' needs are met. However, the older buildings are showing considerable wear and tear, though staff ensure that their use of display enhances the appearance of the buildings. Day-to-day organisation of the school is effective though the arrangements for dealing with some minor health and safety issues are not robust. Secretarial support deals very efficiently with a substantial range of work. The high quality of this support enables the headmaster to have time to lead the whole school effectively.
- 4.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.13 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

### Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 The school is very successful in meeting those of its aims and aspirations that develop good attitudes and values in its pupils, and it is striving to meet its challenging academic aims. The school enjoys strong parental support. Its ethos is characterised by attentive and individual pastoral care that develops strong personal qualities in the pupils, who are confident, and whose behaviour is exemplary most of the time. Their willingness to learn means that they respond very well indeed to the good teaching that prevails and that leads to the high standards achieved. However, teaching, though good, does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills.
- 5.2 In response to the most recent nursery inspection, good progress has been made in improving planning and evaluation for the under 5s. Since the last whole-school inspection, the school has made good progress in many areas, especially in improving the management structure, in the increased use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning, and in its provision for pupils requiring support for their learning. It has also worked substantially on a comprehensive development plan which is currently in draft, and has improved its system of assessment, which is now thorough, but not yet used by many staff to plot pupils' future learning and set appropriate targets. The school is aware of the minor health and safety issues raised during the inspection, and of its other areas for development.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

### Next Steps

- 5.4 The school embarked on a set of measures following the last inspection, to address the weaknesses identified. To move forward further, the school should take the following steps.
1. Simplify the development plan so that the main priorities are clarified and linked to department development planning and staff training needs.
  2. Improve teaching further, by giving more opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills, to include:
    - more tasks designed to explore and investigate open-ended questions;
    - more use of ICT and the library for research in a range of subjects;
    - work designed to suit pupils with different learning styles.
  3. Use assessment data better, for instance to identify next steps for each pupil, so that appropriate academic targets can be set and progress monitored.
  4. Respond to the minor health and safety issues raised.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

## **6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> February 2008. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents to a pre-inspection questionnaire were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

### **List of Inspectors**

Mrs Ruth McFarlane	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Jane Crouch	Headmistress, IAPS school
Mr David Goodwin	Deputy Head, IAPS school
Mr David Horn	Former Head, IAPS school
Mrs Gillian Venn	Head of Pre-Preparatory School, IAPS school