

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### **Prior Park College**

Full Name of the School	<b>Prior Park College</b>
DCSF Number	<b>800/6001</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>281242</b>
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Headmaster	<b>Dr Giles Mercer</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Sister Jane Livesey</b>
Age Range	<b>11 – 18</b>
Gender	<b>Mixed</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>8<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> October 2007</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 was not carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate, and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

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.

# CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	Characteristics of the School .....	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION .....	3
	The Educational Experience Provided .....	3
	Pupils' Learning and Achievements.....	4
	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils .....	6
	The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment).....	7
3.	THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS .....	9
	The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils.....	9
	The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community .....	10
	The Quality of Boarding Education .....	11
4.	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT ....	13
	The Quality of Governance .....	13
	The Quality of Leadership and Management .....	13
5.	CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS.....	15
	Overall Conclusions .....	15
	Next Steps.....	15
6.	SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE .....	16
	List of Inspectors .....	16

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 The college educates boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 18. It offers boarding with overseas students counted among the boarders. The Catholic Christian dimension of the college is a key element in its structure, provision and activities.
- 1.2 The stated aims of the college, as contained in the mission statement are: to provide Catholic Christian education of the highest quality for a boarding and day co-educational community; to develop as fully as possible the academic and other talents of each boy and girl to ensure an education of the whole person; to provide pastoral care of an encouraging, supportive and disciplined nature for each pupil; to create an outward looking ethos which builds links with the parents and the local community and also celebrates the richness of cultures from around the world; to enable college leavers to be confident, capable, compassionate and independent-minded.
- 1.3 The college was founded in 1830 and for much of this period and until 1981 was under the ownership and direction of the Christian Brothers, a community of religious men who specialised in boys' education. It is now in the care of an independent board of governors but owned by The Prior Park Educational Trust. The college is situated to the south of the city of Bath. The original buildings were designed by John Wood the Elder, builder and architect of Georgian Bath. Accommodation providing specialist teaching facilities has been added over the years through refurbishment or through new buildings.
- 1.4 The trust has responsibility for two junior schools as well as for the college. The one governing body administers the three schools. The merger with The Paragon School in Bath has taken place since the last inspection. Since that inspection pupil numbers have increased, and additions and improvements to buildings have been carried out.
- 1.5 A total of 558 pupils are taught, 293 boys and 265 girls. Of these, 116 pupils board, 67 boys and 49 girls. In all, 107 pupils are in Years 7 and 8. A second intake of pupils occurs in Year 9 and the total number of pupils in Years 9 to 11 is 277. The sixth form comprises 93 boys and 81 girls. In total, 11 pupils benefit from Ministry of Defence or Foreign and Commonwealth Office boarding allowances, 12 receive help from educational trust funds and 330 pupils receive some fee support from the college. Pupils are mostly drawn from families with professional and business occupations or backgrounds.
- 1.6 The college does not select entirely on ability. While entry at age 11+ is determined largely by 11+ examination results, an interview with the headmaster and previous school reports play a significant part in the decision to offer a place. Moreover, it is the college policy to admit each year a number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) on condition that their needs can be met. The second cohort of pupils joins the college at 13+ as a result of their performance in Common Entrance, in the college's own 13+ examinations, or are offered scholarships by the college. Similarly, the interview with the headmaster and the report from the pupil's previous school carry some weight in the decision to offer a place. Standardised test results for year groups across the college indicate a wide range of ability between very able pupils and those with average levels of ability or with LDD. Overall the average ability of the pupils is above the national average. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results in public examinations will be above the average for all maintained schools.
- 1.7 Seventy-five pupils are identified by the college as having some degree of LDD and participate in the college support programme. There are no pupils with full statements of

special educational need. Fifty-three pupils are from families with English as an additional language (EAL), of whom thirty receive support from the college.

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

College	NC name
Lower 3	Year 7
Form 3	Year 8
Form 4	Year 9
Lower 5	Year 10
Form 5	Year 11
Lower sixth	Year 12
Upper sixth	Year 13

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

### **The Educational Experience Provided**

- 2.1 The college provides a good range of educational opportunities suited to the interests, aptitudes and needs of each pupil. In so doing, the college successfully achieves its declared aims to provide Catholic Christian education of the highest quality for a boarding and day co-educational community and to develop as fully as possible the academic and other talents of each boy and girl to ensure an education of the whole person.
- 2.2 In the last inspection, the curriculum provision was judged to be broad and balanced, and appropriate to the needs of the pupils. This continues to be the case. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision in terms of facilities, curriculum and staff usage was judged to be limited. Now the provision is extensive, the curriculum allows for effective use of ICT and it is increasingly used in a number of subject areas. The level of technical support has been increased to give good quality back-up for ICT across the college.
- 2.3 All pupils have access to a broad range of educational experiences. Their linguistic, mathematical, scientific and technological prowess is very well developed through the teaching of the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and also ICT. Specific ICT skills that are promoted in discrete ICT lessons in Years 7 to 9 are put to good use in a number of subjects, as well as in the enrichment programme and the personal study of pupils. The range of subjects available to pupils in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form curriculum is broad and allows pupils to make guided choices that contribute to the further development of their technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative development. Pupils are given ample opportunities across many lessons to listen, to voice opinions and to consider those of others. These same skills are further honed in college meetings where pupils' participation is encouraged and in situations that give them an opportunity to influence the college's deliberations.
- 2.4 The development of the individual is a key aim of the college. The high quality of relationships and the experience of working in a community with a strong family atmosphere provide the context for pupils to grow in maturity and self-confidence. Respect for others and an appreciation of the differences between people are developed and experienced in the activities of the house system and in the day to day life of the college. These experiences are explored and articulated in religious education lessons, as well as in the personal development programme (PDP) of the college.
- 2.5 Extra-curricular activities, as well as the enrichment programme, are well used by staff to augment the experience of pupils. The Tuesday afternoon enrichment programme for senior pupils and the enrichment lessons offered in subjects are good examples of activities that contribute to and refine the skills, the knowledge and the personal development of pupils. Sports teams give many opportunities to develop skills across a wide range of games and sport and to develop a sense of pride in representing the college as well as improving health and fitness. The teaching of music is augmented by the many and varied activities offered during the school day as well as after school. Many expeditions, trips abroad, residential and outward-bound experiences further enhance the education of pupils.
- 2.6 Preparation for examinations and for application to universities and colleges is thorough, without detracting from the wider aims of the college. A high level of support is available to older pupils in selecting the next step of their education, giving them an excellent bridge to their future.

- 2.7 The curriculum prepares pupils well for adult life. Pupils develop understanding of key social and personal issues in the PDP, covering such topics as sex education, drugs, citizenship, relationships, responsibility, leadership and the appropriate safeguards to take when using the internet.
- 2.8 Pupils of all abilities, as well as those for whom English is not their principal language, benefit from access to the broad range of subjects and activities and from the support they are given. Clear profile statements of all pupils who require learning support identify the specific difficulty and outline appropriate responses. Each of these pupils has an Individual Education Programme (IEP) and attends one lesson, one-to-one or in a small group of four pupils, per week with their learning support teacher. Provision for those identified as gifted and talented has been started but as yet does not have the support of a specialist in this area. Subject leaders have responsibility for providing for these pupils.
- 2.9 The college meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

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

- 2.10 Pupils of all abilities are well educated and achieve outstanding educational standards. Standards in numeracy and literacy are excellent. Pupils develop to an equally high level the essential skills and attitudes for work and study. Their ability in critical and creative thinking stands them in good stead and contributes to the successes they enjoy in learning and in moving to the next stage of their education. Results in national tests are well above average. The college fulfils its aim of developing the academic and other talents of every pupil.
- 2.11 Across the ages and across all subjects, pupils are very well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding. They are particularly good at critical and creative thinking. Very good examples were seen of pupils applying their prior knowledge, understanding and skills to support their learning. Pupils delight in those lessons where they are given opportunities to be critical in their thinking and to be creative in finding solutions to problems. In a design technology lesson Year 8 pupils were rapt in their work when resolving the problem of designing levers to construct a lifting device that would be effective.
- 2.12 In lessons and in activities, boys and girls of all ages and abilities reach good levels of attainment and make good progress. Pupils with LDD also make good progress and reach standards that are good for their abilities, as do those for whom English is not their first language. More able pupils reach standards that are good for their ability.
- 2.13 Pupils perform very well at GCSE and at A level. Their attainment in GCSE and by Year 13 is good in relation to their ability. Results at GCSE and A level over the last three years have been well above the national average for all maintained secondary schools. Standardised test scores show that pupils make rapid progress over time. On leaving the college pupils are successful in gaining entry to a wide range of courses, most of them to the university of their choice.
- 2.14 Pupils achieve success in many other areas. The strength of music and drama in the college is reflected in the excellent levels of public performances. As well as playing in the National Children's Orchestras, pupils' musical abilities are recognised by their taking top awards in local, regional and national competitions in all branches of music. Drama students have appeared in television drama productions. High standards have been achieved in the Junior Film Critic of the Year and in the National Finals of the Young Journalist of the Year, where in 2007 college pupils were awarded the first three places. Notable success is achieved in mathematics across a wide range of local and national competitions. Major successes in design technology and in art in national competitions have marked the performance of pupils

in these subject areas, while Year 8 pupils were highly commended in a competition run by the Society for General Microbiology. Sports and games are other areas where pupils have enjoyed many successes. Pupils have gained representative honours at county and at national level in rugby. Boys and girls have made their mark in local and regional hockey tournaments with the boys' hockey teams being particularly successful. County honours have been awarded for girls' rugby, girls' tennis, and in cross country running and cricket. Success in individual and team gold awards in the UK Schools Games Fencing has led to selection to fence for England in the U17 World Championships. Each year sees numerous pupils achieving the required standard at gold level in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The high levels of success recorded reflect the success of the college in pursuing excellence for its pupils across such a wide range of activities. In seizing these opportunities, and in rising to the challenges inherent in them, pupils exercise leadership skills, work collaboratively, develop self-discipline and recognise the requirement to work for others.

- 2.15 Pupils develop as articulate and effective communicators. They speak eloquently, listen intelligently and write fluently and imaginatively for a variety of purposes. Pupils showed excellent powers of persuasion and argument in lessons. In interviews, pupils proved to be good listeners, taking the point of questions and addressing precisely the issues raised. In group interviews they listened attentively to each other, picking up and developing points made by other pupils in the group. Their curiosity and inquisitiveness are displayed in the many questions with which they ply visitors.
- 2.16 Pupils make good use of their mathematical understanding to apply concepts, and to use their knowledge and mathematical skills across a range of subjects. Pupils' work and displays in classrooms showed effective grasp of mathematics in subjects such as geography, history and science. A good use of numerical skills was apparent in calculating probability in a business studies lesson with Year 13 pupils.
- 2.17 Pupils' use of ICT is of a high standard. The development of ICT skills and the application of pupils' understanding of a broad range of software make them highly competent in using the range of equipment available to further their learning.
- 2.18 Pupils are good at organising their work. Their written work is generally well presented. Having acquired the skills in their early years at the college, they do not need to be encouraged to take notes and to organise their thinking. The use of personal sketch books in art is well developed, with the girls in particular showing a high level of creative thinking. The use of personal notes in design technology is of such a good quality that the work of the pupils is enhanced. The same high level of note taking is evident in those subjects where pupils are required to investigate and to collate information.
- 2.19 Pupils' enjoyment is a feature of many lessons, helping to create an atmosphere in which they are confident and willing to participate. They delight in their achievements and take pride in their work. They settle quickly to class work and are eager to co-operate with their teachers. They are comfortable working alone, in small groups or in pairs in pursuit of the learning objectives in lessons.

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

- 2.20 The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is outstanding. The college meets effectively its aims of ensuring the education of the whole person and of enabling pupils to be confident, capable, compassionate and independent minded. In the last inspection, the college was judged to be very good in promoting the spiritual and moral development of pupils. The success of the college in this area has been maintained.
- 2.21 Pupils' spiritual development is outstanding. Through the family atmosphere, the quality of supportive relationships and the many activities in the house system, pupils develop a high level of confidence, a sense of self-worth and learn to show compassion and care. These experiences are further enriched by assemblies, interactions with staff and by styles of teaching that challenge pupils to be independent and confident. In many subjects, pupils learn to be reflective, to listen, to show respect and to be aware of the needs of those around them. They take pleasure in the achievement of others no less than in their own. They relate confidently to the adults they meet each day. They are eager to ask questions and to explore the wider aspects of who they are. Pupils gain insights into values and beliefs and into the way in which religious belief affects people's lives through the teaching in religious education, through the comprehensive PDP programme and through mixing with fellow pupils from different nationalities and world faiths.
- 2.22 Pupils' moral awareness is strong and deeply rooted. The behaviour of older pupils is exemplary. By their attitude and their behaviour they contribute to the effective running of the house system providing role models and offering practical support for younger pupils. In interview, pupils said they understood the college's code of conduct and felt it was fair. They were particularly vocal about the response of the college when they make mistakes or misbehave. In their eyes making a mistake is seen as an opportunity for development. Misbehaviour is treated fairly and positively in their experience, and as one pupil said: "at Prior you will be given a second chance but you have to be prepared to take it."
- 2.23 Pupils' orderly movement around the college, and their self-restraint showed how well they understood the need to respect rules and behave in a responsible manner. Good behaviour is explained and praised in assemblies and in meetings and is expected in lessons. The high level of pupils' friendliness and support for each other is one expression of their moral development. The consideration they show visitors is expressed in their good manners, in their willingness to help and in the natural ease with which they engage with those they meet.
- 2.24 The generosity of pupils in supporting a broad range of charities reflects their high level of moral awareness. The work of the group Prior Concern grows out of a well-established culture of charitable giving. House charities are adopted and the Charity Week, which is organised by pupils, gives a focus to their activities. The Eco Week expressed pupils' willingness to understand and involve themselves in matters which affect both local and international communities. Outreach programmes to the local community create a strong sense of the need to live out the moral principles pupils acquire.
- 2.25 Pupils' social development is outstanding. At all ages, they respond very well to the many opportunities they have to undertake responsibilities. Being elected or appointed to the various school committees is valued by pupils and is a role they take most seriously. Pupils readily act as pupil helpers in a subject where they excel and are keen to assist their peers. House and tutor groups foster the growth of a family ethos and a sense of belonging. For instance, pupils' conduct in the dining room shows keen respect for others and for the catering staff who serve them so well.

- 2.26 Pupils care for the fabric of the college and for areas in which they work and relax. The benefits of working in listed buildings are not lost on them. Equally they are aware of their responsibilities for maintaining the quality of the environment in which they find themselves.
- 2.27 Pupils show an awareness of the wider world in which they live. Their organised contacts with the emergency services, with those who care for the needs of others and with some aspects of local government, give them a developing awareness in a wider context. Citizenship issues are covered well in the PDP programme and in a range of subjects.
- 2.28 Pupils acquire a keen appreciation of their own culture and develop respect for differing traditions. Pupils are well aware of the multi-cultural world in which they live. Overseas pupils enrich the diversity within the college. The ways in which pupils from a variety of backgrounds and cultures mingle promote tolerance and foster harmony. This harmony is reinforced by the college rules about respect for others and by pupils being taught to accept the differences between individuals. The comprehensive programme of educational visits, including trips to the theatre, art galleries and historical sites, build pupils' appreciation of and respect for their own traditions and cultures. The many unique contributions of the music and art departments add richness to the cultural experience of pupils. Lessons across a range of subjects and the opportunities for overseas trips, including an increasing number of senior pupils involved in work experience abroad, deepen pupils' appreciation of differences between peoples.
- 2.29 The college meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

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

- 2.30 The staff teach their pupils well. The quality of teaching is good. Staff are effective in helping pupils to think for themselves and to be critical and creative in their work, so realising the college's aims of developing as fully as possible the academic and other talents of each boy and girl to ensure an education of the whole person.
- 2.31 The good quality of teaching enables all pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability. Particular care is taken to ensure that pupils with LDD or EAL make good progress according to their ability. The detailed IEPs for these pupils guide staff in working with them. In lessons, teachers went out of their way to check that pupils with language problems understood the terminology and had a good grasp of the tasks being set. The extra support for pupils with LDD or with EAL by specialist teachers enables these pupils to achieve good standards. The more able pupils respond very well to challenging teaching and they made good progress.
- 2.32 Constant encouragement of pupils to be creative and critical in their thinking results in excellent learning. In a Year 7 history lesson, pupils showed considerable mental ability in finding reasons why the Normans built Motte and Bailey castles. In this lesson, a well-organised series of activities encouraged participation in learning and allowed pupils to be critical of their findings and to discover better solutions to the problems set. The use of humour and the calm approach of teachers created an atmosphere of enjoyment and eagerness that fully engaged pupils in their learning. Pupils were happy to take responsibility for their learning, an attitude that reflects an underlying value of the college that pupils should be self-reliant and responsible.
- 2.33 Departmental discussions, planning and the use of information, allied to very high levels of subject knowledge, mean that teachers plan and organise their lessons thoroughly and appropriately, making efficient use of resources and time. A key element in the success of

teaching is the teachers' good understanding of their pupils and the high level of support that is always available. Regular testing and assessment activities add to this information. The variety of materials and equipment and the quality and quantity of resources provided are good and are well used. As a result teachers have a wide range of options as to how they present their lessons and involve pupils.

- 2.34 In the best lessons, pupils were challenged to apply prior knowledge and understanding effectively. In a Year 11 lesson preparing pupils for a coursework task in history, pupils responded enthusiastically to the positive approach of the teacher that engaged their reasoning skills and required them to argue well and present their views coherently. In a Year 7 science lesson on the states of matter, the appropriateness of the carefully selected materials and the variety of activities engaged the pupils from the start so that they developed a good understanding of the topic and made good progress in their learning. In lessons where pupils were challenged to carry out practical activities or to work out solutions to problems, they showed an eagerness to think for themselves. The imaginative presentation of topics by teachers went a long way to building a secure foundation on which successful lessons were built. For instance, in a Year 8 lesson on algebra and equations, the use of a problem solving approach and an interactive game that demanded reasoned responses enabled a less able group to master difficult conceptual techniques for solving equations. The good-natured interaction with individual pupils, the variety of activities and the smart pace of the best lessons promoted outstanding learning.
- 2.35 Occasionally, lessons concentrated too much on explaining and reinforcing the content, or the teachers provided too few opportunities for pupil participation. While generally teachers' explanations and instructions to pupils were clear, there were a few occasions when a lack of clarity left some pupils confused or the task set did not match the abilities of the pupils who had to wait for further assistance from the teachers. These lessons lacked the pace, enthusiasm and pupil involvement that were so evident in the best.
- 2.36 Evaluation of performance against national norms is carried out each year on the publication of GCSE and A-level results. Discussions between the academic deputy head and subject leaders analyse performances in a way that provides the foundation for planning for the future. Standardised scores are used effectively to build an understanding of pupils' needs and this information is widely used throughout the college. As a result, styles of teaching, lesson content and specialised support are adapted to ensure good progress by all pupils.
- 2.37 The quality of marking across the college is satisfactory. In some subjects detailed written comments and targets are given. This is not the case in all subjects, but good oral feedback on performance in lessons and on homework gives pupils all the guidance they need to move forward in their learning. Pupils confirmed they understand and benefit from the responses of teachers to their work. Information gathered about pupils' performance is used to modify plans and strategies for future teaching.
- 2.38 The orderly behaviour of pupils in lessons is a consequence of good teaching and of the good relationships between teachers and pupils, and among pupils themselves. It is also a manifestation of the sense of responsibility that pupils are encouraged to acquire as they mature. In this atmosphere, teachers can concentrate on using a variety of teaching styles to respond to the learning needs of their pupils.
- 2.39 The college 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 care for pupils is outstanding. The college fully achieves its aim to provide pastoral care of an encouraging, supportive and disciplined nature for each pupil. The last inspection report commented that the high quality of pastoral care ensures that pupils receive the individual support and guidance, which they need. This continues to be the case with the quality of care and relationships being a strength of the college.
- 3.2 Staff provide effective support and guidance for all pupils. The house system is the key structure around which the pastoral care of pupils is built. Within the house system, the vertical family groups and the tutor groups enable staff to know every pupil well and to monitor their progress. The chaplain, the college nurse and the careers teachers work in close harmony with the heads of houses. Daily contact with teachers and support staff gives pupils many chances to discuss personal issues and to seek help. Pupils said they had no hesitation in turning to staff for assistance. The head of sixth form plays an important role in supporting the smooth transition of pupils from the college to further education and to the world of work. The quality of this support for pupils is so good that many choose to call on the school's services even after they have left the college.
- 3.3 Effective pastoral arrangements support staff in the exercise of their responsibilities. The pastoral system is well directed by the deputy head, who works closely with heads of houses to give tutors the guidance and the support they need to be effective in their work. All required policies for the pastoral care of pupils are in place giving due guidance to staff on how best to serve the needs of their pupils.
- 3.4 The outstanding quality of relationships between staff and pupils is a key element in creating and sustaining the ethos of the college. Indeed, the relaxed and friendly manner in which pupils and staff mix enhances every aspect of the life of the college.
- 3.5 Pupils are aware of their responsibility for considerate behaviour. This theme is well covered in assemblies, in the PDP programme and in the many opportunities pupils have for discussion. Pupils are well aware of the anti-bullying stance of the college and play a major role in preventing bullying from taking place. In interviews, pupils said they knew what to do if bullying should occur, but expressed the opinion that it happened only rarely, if at all. Strategies to foster good behaviour and to prevent bullying are based on encouragement and positive reinforcement. Positive teaching in the pastoral programme and practical advice given to parents and to pupils highlight the dangers of unwise use of the internet. This advice is backed up by monitoring internet usage and by careful screening of equipment used by staff and pupils. The college has taken every reasonable precaution to educate and protect staff and pupils from cyber abuse.
- 3.6 The college takes meticulous care to safeguard and promote pupils' well-being. Child protection arrangements are well documented in the staff handbook, expressed in the college policies, known by staff and carefully observed. The named person for child protection is the deputy head who has been trained appropriately. Staff training has been carried out according to requirements.
- 3.7 Procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety are secure. Risk assessments for all activities are carried out with great attention to detail. Pupils taken ill are treated with due care and consideration. Suitably qualified first aiders are readily available throughout the college although there are too few public notices advising who the nearest first aiders are and

where they can be found. The admissions register is well kept. Registration procedures are effective and lateness and absences are dealt with appropriately. High levels of attendance allow pupils to benefit from the many experiences the college provides as part of their education. All necessary measures have been taken to minimise the risks from fire and other hazards and full records with detailed evaluations of fire drills are kept. The quality and quantity of the food served are very good, with a wide choice available to suit all requirements. Catering staff and teachers supervise the dining area encouraging pupils to eat a balanced diet. Certain issues to do with health and safety require attention. Some storage of equipment and artefacts in the science and in the art rooms is unsafe. The broken surface of a path near the geography classrooms makes it hazardous. The congestion on the driveway in front of the main college building before morning registration is a potential hazard to pupils who must make their way around the many cars using this entrance to the college grounds.

- 3.8 The college meets most of the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) ensure that equipment and artefacts are safely stored in the art and science areas [Regulation 3.(4)];
  - (b) include the repair of the broken surface of a footpath in the college's refurbishment plan [Regulation 3.(4)].

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

- 3.9 The college has an effective partnership with parents and worthwhile links with the wider community which are beneficial to its pupils. The range of these links were recognised in the last inspection, since when, further means of communication with parents have been added. Success in developing these links has enabled the college to meet its declared aim of creating an outward looking ethos which builds positive relationships with the parents and the local community, and also celebrates the richness of cultures from around the world.
- 3.10 The responses to the parents' questionnaire, completed before the inspection, reflected high parental satisfaction with the education and the support given to their children. Parents were strongly appreciative of the ready access to the headmaster and staff, and for the fact that issues are dealt with speedily and to the benefit of the pupils. A very small number of parents raised concerns about poor behaviour in lessons with younger pupils, about the vigilance of the college regarding healthy eating, and restricted communication between the college and parents, especially in Years 7 and 8. The inspectors found no evidence to support these concerns. Indeed the vast majority of parents complimented the college on the new steps it has taken to communicate with them on a weekly basis. In informal conversations with parents during the inspection, unsolicited and genuine appreciation was expressed for what the college does for the pupils.
- 3.11 Parents are encouraged to be involved in all activities such as sports, assemblies, concerts, drama productions and other college events and are welcomed to support the work and progress of their children. Parents are invited to speak on issues of importance, and to share their expertise on a range of topics. The invitation to join the college community in the celebration of the Sunday Mass is taken up by many parents who live within range of the college. These occasions and easy access to senior staff afford parents further opportunities to meet staff and discuss issues.
- 3.12 The homework diary is a regular point of contact between parents and classroom teachers. Newsletters and the regular updating of the website, as well as the weekly email of a bulletin giving news and information are greatly appreciated by parents. 'The Community

Handbook' gives parents comprehensive and detailed information about the workings of the college. Regular reports serve as a good source of information about pupils' progress.

- 3.13 The strongly supportive Society of Parents and Friends of the College is a vibrant association which organises a number of large, imaginative and successful events which provide funding for further facilities that benefit the education of the pupils. The termly association newsletter 'Mansion Matters' keeps parents informed about association and college business and captures the spirit of fun which characterises association activities.
- 3.14 The college handles the concerns of parents with due care. The college now publishes its formal complaints procedure annually as well as telling parents of the number of complaints raised in the preceding academic year. There were no formal complaints in the last academic year.
- 3.15 The college makes a deliberate effort to look actively and widely beyond its walls to help pupils be better informed on broad issues and to prepare them for responsible citizenship. Part of this process is setting up positive links with the local community. The music department takes its excellent concerts to local elderly care homes. The modern languages department has held a day of French theatre where pupils acted fairy stories for local schools. The science department organised a Science Fair Week inviting pupils from other schools. The sixth form charities committee organises a large number of creative events which are fun, involve the whole college and raise considerable sums of money for local, national and international charities. The senior pupil charity group 'Prior Concern' works with the needy in the local area under the leadership of the chaplain and brings pupils in contact with the reality of deprivation as it exists in their local community.
- 3.16 The college meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

### **The Quality of Boarding Education**

- 3.17 The quality of the boarding experience is good and supports pupils' education making a significant contribution to the college's aim to educate the whole person.
- 3.18 Relationships within boarding are excellent. They are positive and supportive both between staff and pupils and among pupils themselves. Senior pupils play an important role in the welfare of the younger pupils, supervising prep, organising house-based activities in sport and music, giving encouragement and acting as role models for younger pupils. Pupils said they benefited from the vertical family system of groupings within the boarding houses because it made them feel at ease with older pupils. Pupils from overseas are made welcome in the boarding system with special attention paid to helping them to settle in and make friends. Pupils appreciated the contacts with staff in the boarding houses, the availability of the chaplain and the ease of access to the college nurse.
- 3.19 A good range of activities is provided for boarders during the week and at weekends. Trips off-campus or activities using on-site facilities are provided each week by house staff. Boarders are actively encouraged to participate in the broad range of events provided.
- 3.20 The quality of accommodation and resources within the houses is both adequate and suitable. Pupils have access to a number of kitchens, games rooms and computer suites. Each house has a variety of rooms where boarders can relax on their own or with friends. A quiet purposeful atmosphere was observed during 'night-prep' which contributed to effective independent study. There is evidence of redecoration and refurbishment since the last inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in September 2006.

Planning permission has been obtained for the detailed plans for further work that includes the complete refurbishment of the Years 7 and 8 day house. The work is due to be completed in 2008.

3.21 The areas for improvement identified in the CSCI report have been addressed.

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

### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 The quality of governance is good. The board of governors has set appropriate aims and values for the college, and provides effective oversight and guidance. The constituency of the governing body now provides an improved balance of governors' specialities from that at the time of the last inspection. The breadth of expertise among the governors makes them a valuable resource from which the college draws considerable benefit.
- 4.2 The structure and management arrangements relating to the governors are well defined and allow them to have effective oversight of the college. There is a clear understanding of their role in the management of the college, which allows the headmaster to exercise his role and responsibilities appropriately and effectively. Regular meetings between the headmaster and the board of governors give the governors the information they need to be fully conversant with the activities, needs and opportunities facing the college. Working closely with the headmaster and senior staff, they have put in place structures and procedures that provide a framework for the daily work of the college while the comprehensive development plan prioritises the key elements for future growth. Governors are assiduous in monitoring the implementation of their plans.
- 4.3 The governing body is aware of its legal obligations and meets them. Individual governors are assigned responsibilities in key areas which they carry out effectively. They are actively involved with staff leading those areas within the college. For instance, the governor with responsibility for child protection has been involved in the creation of scenarios to test the college's child protection policy and procedures. Governors are involved appropriately in the preparation and review of all policies.
- 4.4 Most of the governors' deliberations take place at the termly meeting of the governing body. Some of the heavy workload of these meetings is eased by the activities of the finance and general purposes sub-committee and by the advisory committees for the two junior schools in the Foundation. Key staff are invited to full meetings of the board of governors to discuss the work of the college. On the day of the governors' termly meeting, staff are invited to meet informally with governors over lunch to discuss issues and to expand governors' understanding of the work of the staff. In addition, two governors spend a day in college each term visiting lessons, meeting staff and holding discussions with subject leaders. The opportunity to consider the information collected is constrained by the demands of a heavy agenda at the general meeting of the governing body.

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

- 4.5 The quality of leadership and management is outstanding. Senior managers and others with delegated duties are effective in carrying out their responsibilities.
- 4.6 Clear educational direction and leadership are provided by those with management responsibilities, as reflected in the quality of education, the care of pupils and the achievement of the college's aims. The headmaster's commitment to creating a community where pupils and staff can experience the underlying values of the Catholic Christian education offered is reflected in the manner of working and in the success of the senior team. After the last inspection, the senior management team was reorganised, with the addition of the director of admissions and marketing and the replacement of the roles of senior teacher and director of studies by those of second deputy head and academic deputy head with each

member of the team carrying appropriate levels of responsibility which they exercise effectively. Heads of house and heads of department respond positively to the opportunities offered them to lead and manage colleagues. The future direction and development of the college, as expressed in the development plan, are based on a clear understanding of the college's key strengths and identified areas for development. Staff are actively engaged in reviews and analyses of performance and are active participants in the decision making process of the college.

- 4.7 Those with management responsibilities are effective in analysing the college's needs, and in planning, and putting decisions into practice. Sound and prudent financial advice and control led by the bursar underpins the development process. Much informal monitoring takes place, but careful analysis of pupil performance, scrutiny of tests and formal assessments give the monitoring the substance it needs to be effective. Senior staff monitor and lead reviews of the effectiveness of all policies and procedures.
- 4.8 Management at all levels is effective in securing, supporting, developing and motivating high-quality staff. The college has an effective system for checking the suitability of staff, supply staff and governors. There is an appropriate programme for the induction of newly qualified teachers. Professional development is linked with staff appraisal and is now on a much stronger footing than existed at the last inspection. Lesson observation, mentoring and the spreading use of peer review are proving to be effective tools for professional development. Support staff are included in the professional development programme with training on issues to do with health and safety and concerning requirements under child protection legislation. In their manner of working and in the way they relate to pupils, staff exemplify the qualities that underpin the aims of the college.
- 4.9 Finances are very well managed so that appropriate resources are provided. The high level of maintenance of the listed buildings and the addition of specialist teaching accommodation have provided pupils with an attractive and stimulating environment. Teaching resources are sufficient for effective teaching. The well-provided library is a valuable asset for private research and study as well as providing a quiet haven for personal reading.
- 4.10 The administration of the college is effective and efficient. The administrative, catering and maintenance staff contribute to achieving the aims of the college by the range and quality of support they offer. The high quality of relationships between these staff and pupils makes a real contribution to the family atmosphere of the college.
- 4.11 The college meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.12 The college 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 college is highly successful in creating a Catholic Christian education. The religious beliefs underpinning that education are the bedrock on which the life of the college is built. They provide the motivation for the leadership of the college and the strong commitment of the staff. Those beliefs find expression in the high quality of relationships that are so influential in creating an educational community where care for, and the development of, the whole person are key elements. This quality of care for the individual is comprehensive and outstanding. The needs of pupils with a wide range of abilities and interests, and from a variety of backgrounds, are met successfully and pupils make good progress in all aspects of their learning and development. The outstanding leadership and management, effectively supported by the work of the governing body, give clear educational direction, resulting in the very high standards achieved. Pupils grow to be intelligent, self-confident and independent young people, showing strong discipline, with a high level of sensitivity towards the values and the needs of others. Their solid grounding in learning skills is reflected in the excellent levels of attainment in examinations and activities as well as in the high degree of critical and creative ability they show in their work. Effective partnership with parents and worthwhile links with the wider community enrich the provision for pupils' education. The college is successful in meeting its aims.
- 5.2 The issues raised at the last inspection have been successfully addressed. The job description of the deputy head has been rewritten to take account of the appointment of two further deputies. Roles and responsibilities of key post holders across the college have been reviewed and redefined. ICT facilities have been greatly expanded and ICT usage is spreading across the college. Professional development is well structured. Attendance registers are kept securely in a central place.
- 5.3 The school complies with most of the regulatory requirements, but does not at present meet Standard 3 (welfare, health and safety of pupils).

### Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has very few issues to resolve but in order to improve its provision further it should address the following matters.
1. Develop further the provision for the gifted and talented by:
    - ensuring consistency across all subjects;
    - training key staff to lead this aspect in subject areas.
  2. Continue to develop the quality of marking by:
    - ensuring the correct observance of the college's policy by all teachers;
    - sharing the excellent practice of marking in particular subject areas.
- 5.5 In order to meet all the regulatory requirements, the school must:
- (1) ensure that equipment and artefacts are safely stored in the art and science areas [Regulation 3.(4)];
  - (2) include the repair of the broken surface of a footpath in the college's refurbishment plan [Regulation 3.(4)].

## 6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> October 2007. 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. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.
- 6.2 A bursar from another school joined the reporting inspector on the preliminary visit as part of the Independent Schools' Bursars Association (ISBA) scheme, spending the day with the bursar's department. The principal findings have been included in the relevant sections of this report.

### List of Inspectors

Mr Edward Dunphy	Reporting Inspector
Miss Rosanne Musgrave	Former Headteacher, GSA school
Mr John Aguilar	Deputy Headteacher, HMC school
Mr Rick Raumann	Head of Geography, HMC school
Mrs Janet Dunn	Headmistress, GSA school
Mr Joseph Peake	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Alasdair McBay	Head of Mathematics, HMC school
Mrs Tricia Cullen	Assistant Reporting Inspector