

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Hereford Cathedral School

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

Full Name of the School	Hereford Cathedral School
DCSF Number	884/6004
Registered Charity Number	518889
Address	Old Deanery, The Cathedral Close, Hereford, Herefordshire HR1 2NG.
Telephone Number	01432 363522
Fax Number	01432 363525
Email Address	hmpa@hcsch.org
Headmaster	Mr Paul Smith
Chairman of Governors	The Earl of Darnley
Age Range	11 to 18
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	3rd to 6th November 2008

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.

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Characteristics of the School	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION	2
	The Educational Experience Provided	2
	Pupils' Learning and Achievements.....	4
	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils	5
	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
4.	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT	12
	The Quality of Governance	12
	The Quality of Leadership and Management	12
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 Hereford Cathedral School is a selective, independent day school for girls and boys aged 3 to 18. It is one of the oldest schools in the country, probably existing as a song school to the Cathedral in the 7th century. The school was re-founded in the 1380s and was a small school until the inter-war period. The school gained direct grant status in 1945, and by 1970 had expanded to 370 pupils. The change to coeducation in 1970 together with the re-establishment of a junior school (Hereford Cathedral Junior School) in 1987 helped to expand numbers further. The school is part of an ancient cathedral foundation; as a Choir School, it educates the cathedral choristers and has the privilege of using the Cathedral as its chapel. Its various buildings are situated around the Cathedral within a few minutes walking distance. The sports fields at Wyese are 15 minutes walk from the main school.
- 1.2 The school aims, as stated in the staff handbook, to provide an education within a supportive, tolerant and structured environment, which offers each pupil an opportunity to develop every aspect of his or her potential. As befits a Christian school in the Anglican tradition, each pupil is encouraged to consider seriously and openly the Christian tradition. While academic development is a central objective, the school aims, through example and ethos, to prepare pupils for life beyond school, fostering certain qualities and values, such as self-discipline, diligence, trustworthiness, loyalty, sensitivity to the needs and views of others and an acceptance of responsibility and challenge.
- 1.3 The senior school consists, at present, of 521 pupils, 258 boys and 263 girls. Of these, 395 pupils (195 boys and 200 girls) are in Years 7 to 11, and 126 pupils (63 boys and 63 girls) are in Years 12 and 13. Although all are day pupils, they come not only from professional families living within the city but also from a widely spread area across the Herefordshire countryside and beyond. Approximately 25 pupils leave each year after GCSE, either for sixth form colleges or for other colleges and schools. About ten or twelve pupils join the sixth form each year. Almost all of those leaving after Year 13 go on to degree courses, one out of every six after a gap year.
- 1.4 Nationally standardised tests indicate that the ability profile of the school is well above the national average. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results in public examinations will be well above the average for all maintained secondary schools but not as high as the average for maintained selective schools. No pupils have statements of special educational needs, but 61 pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) and needing learning support, 40 boys and 21 girls. Two pupils do not have English as their principal language; one receives language support.
- 1.5 Since the last inspection, a new sixth form centre has been opened and the entire senior management team has changed. The present headmaster has been in post for three years.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The educational experience provided for pupils is good overall, with several outstanding features. It successfully reflects the school's aims and philosophy in supporting the full development of pupils' potential in a caring environment, enabling them to mature into well-rounded young people. A broad, challenging, yet generally well-balanced curriculum is enriched by an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities and extensive careers guidance. Improvements since the last inspection include the introduction of a strong programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHE) in Years 7 to 10 and of an innovative Year 12 general studies programme. Strong provision is made for pupils with LDD. Parents are almost unanimous in their praise for the curriculum and for the range of extra-curricular opportunities provided.
- 2.2 The broad and balanced curriculum nurtures the physical and mental well-being of pupils and provides them with exciting creative opportunities. Its well-planned progression supports the full development of pupils' potential. Secure foundations for later study are laid in Years 7 to 9 and skills of literacy and numeracy are rapidly developed. Substantial access to a core of English, mathematics, modern languages, the three sciences, physical education (PE), religious studies (RS) and PSHE, and to a range of humanities and creative subjects, ensures that the curriculum contributes effectively to pupils' academic development. Streaming and setting are used flexibly to respond to pupils' differing needs. Information and communication technology (ICT) is taught as a discrete subject in Years 7 and 8, providing a sound foundation for pupils' confident later use of ICT across the curriculum, when they are offered the opportunity. However, little evidence was seen in lessons of a successful integration of ICT into schemes of work across the curriculum in later years. In Year 9, Latin is introduced for pupils with good linguistic ability, who can cope with an extra subject. As stated in the last report, the allocation of double periods within the timetable structure is helpful in many subjects, but modern languages, and other subjects in Years 7 to 9, do not benefit as easily from this structure.
- 2.3 In Years 10 and 11, the maintenance of the basic core curriculum, supplemented by three courses chosen from a list of humanities, creative subjects, a second modern foreign language and Latin, offers the possibility of a balanced progression for all pupils, particularly as all pupils study three sciences. Half choose to prepare for the GCSE examinations in the three separate sciences, and half take dual award science. However, an imbalance was observed at this level in the time allocated to the different aspects of the curriculum, with science, particularly the dual award course, being generously treated to the detriment of English, which is restricted to an eighth of curricular time. Provision is made for GCSE examinations to be taken early in mathematics, to allow able pupils to pursue more challenging AS-level studies. Greek and Japanese are offered outside the timetable. The extent of A-level provision, 24 courses, is exceptional, given the relatively small size of the sixth form. The list includes economics, philosophy and ethics, and psychology. AS Greek is also offered.
- 2.4 The comprehensive PSHE programme encompasses life skills, study skills, social and moral topics, health education and citizenship. Its coverage of sex and relationships follows school policy, approved by governors, in stressing the importance of stable and loving relationships, and of respect and care, attitudes which closely reflect the school's aims and ethos. The Year 12 enrichment, in the creation of which pupils had a strong voice, encompasses both life skills and leisure pursuits, including a pre-driver-training scheme, outdoor education (canoeing and rock climbing), sports leadership, finance for university, and career-based

- options in veterinary science and the medical profession. Several courses are led by expert outside practitioners.
- 2.5 The enormous variety of extra-curricular activities provided is a major strength of the school, offering extensive opportunities for all pupils to improve their inter-personal, leadership and team-working skills and to develop their talents to the full. Participation rates are high. Pupils are expected to participate in a range of activities and tutors encourage and monitor their involvement. The exceptional range of extra-curricular music includes a symphony orchestra that feeds and sustains the Hereford Youth Orchestra, a chapel choir of some 100 voices and a chamber choir, finalists in 2008 in the Radio Three 'Choir of the Year' competition. Over 350 pupils receive tuition from 27 specialist instrumental music staff; twenty musical ensembles rehearse weekly and around ten concerts and recitals are held each term. Three school drama productions take place annually. Art, pottery, textiles and technology clubs are well supported, as are the two debating societies. Thirty clubs are listed, with provision ranging from Italian and Japanese to chess, karate and a millionaires' club. A book club meets in the excellent library facility. All Year 9 pupils become members of the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and numbers continuing in later years are high. Its provision of outdoor pursuits and camps is popular, the latter almost always involving leadership competitions. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DoE) has 200 pupils on roll. Its last two gold expeditions have been in the Alps and the Pyrenees. Sporting provision is excellent. Teams represent the school in hockey, rounders, netball, tennis, athletics, cricket, rugby and rowing. Sports teams have visited Barbados and South Africa. Appropriate provision is also made for pupils seeking recreational sporting opportunities, particularly higher up the school. Two sixth-formers help coach Year 7 rugby teams.
- 2.6 This provision is supplemented by a remarkable number of cultural foreign trips. Language exchanges take place with pupils in Spain and France. RS pupils visit Prague and Krakow, artists go to Florence or Paris, classicists travel to Athens or to Pompeii, a combined history and art trip visited Russia, economists have been to New York, and historians experience the First World War battlefields. The jewel in the crown is undoubtedly the school's link with a school at Ghachok in Nepal, from which several excited pupils had just returned at the start of the inspection.
- 2.7 Strong careers guidance is offered to senior pupils. A comprehensive programme prepares them well for university entrance and for later life. The careers library is extremely well equipped and provides a welcoming environment. A small number of pupils do work experience in Year 12, but no provision is at present made for all pupils to be offered the chance to do so. Similarly, some pupils do voluntary service helping in the junior school or as the service element in the DoE scheme, but no formal programme forms part of extra-curricular provision. The school is aware of these gaps in provision and is considering how best to remedy them.
- 2.8 An excellent learning support structure caters highly efficiently for all pupils with LDD. All new pupils are screened on entry. Those with learning disabilities have appropriate individual education plans which are prepared and monitored by the learning support coordinator. All pupils with LDD are entered onto the learning support register. Directives giving targeted support for each individual pupil on the register, suggesting appropriate teaching strategies to adopt, are cascaded to subject teachers via the school intranet. Pupils with LDD are also withdrawn from French lessons in order to receive regular, tailored support from the learning support staff, who also teach the weakest groups in English and French in Year 7. Inconsistency in some subject teachers' following-up of recommendations was seen to undermine pupils' involvement in their studies. Excellent practice was, however, observed in English, where pupils in the fourth Year 10 set made excellent progress, having

been grouped according to their needs, assigned tasks of varying difficulty and monitored regularly. Many subjects offer open access weekly clinics.

- 2.9 Clear, comprehensive policies cover the curriculum, admissions, and equal opportunities. Effective curricular planning and organisation provide good continuity and progression of learning. Stronger links are being established with the junior school to ensure greater continuity of learning between Years 6 and 7. The learning support coordinator attends the Year 6 spelling club to get to know the needs of pupils whom she will be supporting later.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.11 Pupils' attainment is good in relation to their abilities, both in lessons observed and work scrutinized and in GCSE and A-level examinations. The school successfully fulfils its aim to nurture an enjoyment of learning and provide opportunities for all pupils to fulfil their potential. Since the last inspection, standards of learning have improved significantly. Pupils are very well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding in the subjects studied and generally apply these very effectively. They achieve high standards in the wide range of creative and extra-curricular activities in which they participate.
- 2.12 Nationally standardised measures of progress made from Year 7 up to GCSE show pupils consistently achieving above average levels of learning in relation to their ability. However, some inconsistency is apparent in their relative attainment across different curriculum areas and this was confirmed by lesson observations. In the best lessons, pupils show intellectual excitement and considerable independence of thought. As a result, A-level art pupils have achieved success in being placed amongst the top AQA candidates nationally for six years running, whilst pupils in economics and English have gained similar distinction at GCSE level. Higher ability pupils are enabled to look beyond the constraints of the examination syllabus, once it is apparent that a top grade is within their grasp, but not with sufficient regularity. An over-reliance on teacher-directed approaches sometimes leads to a lack of challenge and restricts the pupils' learning, particularly for those in the middle range of ability. By contrast, pupils with specific learning difficulties and those at the lower end of the ability range are given highly effective support, and make significant progress, leading in many cases to levels of attainment well above average for their ability. The school is aware of these discrepancies.
- 2.13 Pupils' performance in GCSE and A-level examinations over the three most recent years for which comparative data is available has been well above the average for all maintained schools, and in line with that for maintained selective schools. It is therefore good in relation to their abilities, both for boys and for girls. In GCSE, half of all papers gained an A* or A grade, whilst, at A-level, seven out of every ten were awarded either an A or a B grade. These results, allied to the large number of lessons in which pupils' learning was judged to be outstanding, compare well with the judgment expressed in the last report that standards were less than favourable in comparison with those achieved in maintained selective schools and that attainment in lessons and work scrutinized was commensurate with ability. Over the last three years, almost nine out of every ten Year 13 leavers have gained a place on their first choice university course.
- 2.14 Pupils achieve notable success in an extensive range of activities and are strongly encouraged in their endeavours by the exceptionally supportive ethos of the school. In 2007, two pupils gained a gold award in the Senior Mathematical Challenge. In 2008, thirteen pupils gained similar distinction in the Intermediate and Junior Challenges, with individual pupils qualifying for the Mathematics Olympiad and the 'Grey Kangaroo' competition. An

Arkwright Award was made during 2008, the classical drama group Kaloi k'Agathoi enjoys a growing national reputation and drama pupils win cups at the Hereford Arts Festival. Among many sporting successes, four pupils have represented England in rounders. Large numbers of pupils represent the region and county in a variety of sports; on the athletics field, pupils won seven gold medals at county level in 2007. During the same year, four pupils gained organ and choral scholarships at Cambridge. CCF cadets qualify for national finals in orienteering and ground training, coming regularly in the top five and winning the latter once in the last five years.

- 2.15 Pupils develop the essential skills and attitudes for work and study. The high standards of behaviour, respect and sensitivity to others noted in the last inspection report have been maintained. Pupils listen effectively and contribute willingly to discussion. They have the confidence to pose pertinent questions and to ask for help, when they need clarification. Most pupils take great pride in their written work, which shows high levels of literacy and numeracy. Year 13 economists were observed using scatter diagrams effectively to draw conclusions about the relationship between competition and productivity. High levels of articulacy were demonstrated in formal debate and in many class discussions. Pupils show good ICT skills, whether working enthusiastically in Year 7 to develop a leaflet on environmental issues using desk-top publishing software or analysing data and plotting graphs in Year 13. They grasp opportunities to use ICT readily, as in Year 12 music pupils' confident use of a composition package, but little evidence was seen of schematic use of ICT in lessons across the curriculum.
- 2.16 As co-operative learners, pupils achieve high standards. They settle willingly to work, respect others' views, and contribute productively to team activities. As they progress up the school, pupils become increasingly confident, but lack sufficient opportunities to exercise choice over tasks, according to ability.
- 2.17 Pupils enjoy their learning and apply themselves effectively. Many pupils are assiduous note-takers; by the end of Year 11 they have gained the confidence to be more selective in their note-taking, because of the firm foundations they have been given. Some pupils lack self-reliance when confronted with difficult material; the importance of risk-taking for intellectual growth is not sufficiently emphasised.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.18 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. It is eloquent testimony to the school's successful achievement of its overriding aim to educate the whole pupil. Parents gratefully acknowledge the way the school enables their children to develop into mature, well-rounded young people and strongly approve of the attitudes and values it promotes. Since the last inspection, the school has continued to develop and improve its excellent practice in this area.
- 2.19 Pupils' spiritual awareness permeates the community. As part of an ancient cathedral foundation and as a choir school, the school takes every advantage of its privileged situation and takes pride in promoting a sense of values which transcend the material and foster reflection on life's meaning and purpose. Each pupil attends the cathedral for morning chapel three times a week, during which time is always given for pupils to reflect in silence, a thoughtful and much appreciated provision. Addresses in chapel and major liturgical events, such as the Carol and Remembrance Day Services, clearly promote the Christian ethos, but this is not forced on pupils; they are encouraged to consider seriously and openly both Christian traditions and their own religious beliefs and to choose their own forms of spirituality. All pupils take the religious studies short course GCSE, in which many faiths

are explored. Year 9 RS pupils were observed comparing their own versions of the ten commandments with the central tenets of other faiths.

- 2.20 Equally fundamental to pupils' strong personal growth and developing self-awareness are the remarkably supportive relationships which are characteristic of the whole school community. They create an atmosphere in which pupils can confidently explore their beliefs and develop their thinking without fear of ridicule. Debate and discussion are rife. Within the curriculum, a strong PSHE programme helps increase pupils' self-awareness and self-esteem. Awe and wonder are not restricted to services in cathedral, as the pervasive presence of pupils' artwork around the school makes clear. The successful stress on creativity, seen not least in the high participation rates and excellent levels of performance in music, adds a further dimension to many pupils' personality, whilst extensive sporting and outdoor education opportunities also encourage their personal growth. Pupils' reactions to their exposure to the horrors of Auschwitz during a recent religious studies trip showed considerable emotional depth and a growing understanding of evil.
- 2.21 Pupils' qualities of character from which moral and responsible behaviour proceed are built up cumulatively in the course of all the relationships which they form. Staff and elder pupils act as excellent role models and their example of care, respect and tolerance for others plays a strong part in developing pupils' moral code. The school rules are generally respected; as one Year 7 pupil opined: "they are just common sense". Opportunities to explore moral issues are readily seized upon within the curriculum. Year 10 history pupils were observed grappling with totalitarianism and the issues arising from Stalin's years in the USSR. Literary study opens up new avenues, as when Year 8 pupils were looking at the holocaust through the medium of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. The study of ethics, including medical ethics, forms an integral part of the RS and philosophy courses in Years 10 to 13. In all the above areas, the stress is firmly laid on encouraging pupils to think for themselves. A strong charities committee helps raise awareness of the needs of others.
- 2.22 The school's ethos of mutual support, respect and endeavour is the motive force behind pupils' outstanding social skills. Examples in service to others set by matrons, subject teachers, tutors, senior management, heads of house and senior pupils create a strong sense of social cohesion, within which pupils develop excellent cooperative team-working skills. They get together to support their peers, they give their all in sports teams, choirs and orchestras, and they work brilliantly in tandem to carry the day in the debating chamber. An outside community group's staging of a play in school was only made possible by the willing help of a team of sixth-form technicians each night. Monitors have a mature and responsible attitude to their role and other sixth-formers give of their time and energy to help younger pupils as form monitors lower down the school. Opportunities for taking on responsibility abound, as monitors, in the houses, in sport, music and drama, in the DoE and the CCF, and in outdoor pursuits, all of which contribute to pupils' social development. Their social awareness is enhanced in PSHE lessons, whether discussing the celebrity culture or learning about the role of the police in Year 8, or focusing on anger, friendship and love in Year 9. Pupils are encouraged to become good citizens. The enthusiastic delivery of a Year 7 lesson on elections gave pupils a real sense of democracy in action. The eclectic range of Year 12 general studies places a strong emphasis on life skills, including preparing pupils for future careers in medicine and veterinary science. Some pupils are involved in community service through the DoE programme. Pupils play their part readily in the creation of a tolerant, supportive school community. Their loyalty makes them its strongest ambassadors, but no formal body exists through which their voice can be heard and their cooperation sought to develop an even stronger learning environment.

- 2.23 The school's ethnic mix being relatively homogenous, pupils' introduction to cultural differences comes first from within the classroom and from themes in chapel assemblies. Pupils learn to look outwards from their own communities to the world at large so that they develop tolerance of other ways of life and an awareness of their place in the world. Scrutiny of Year 9 pupils' written work in geography revealed remarkable empathy with underprivileged children in the third world and acute understanding of their plight. An extensive programme of cultural trips abroad, including visits to Prague, Athens, Florence, New York and Russia, opens pupils' eyes and extends their cultural horizons. Linguists sample family life abroad on exchanges to France and Spain. The long-term link with a school in Ghachok village in Nepal provides pupils with the opportunity to gain experience of life in a less economically developed country at first hand. CCF cadets experience at first hand the problems facing people living in a divided community on visits to Cyprus.
- 2.24 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.25 The good standards of teaching overall, with almost one lesson in every three observed outstanding, are a vital factor in the school's successful realisation of its aim to enable pupils to achieve their full potential. The inspectors' findings reflect parents' enthusiastic praise for the standards of teaching. Since the last inspection, standards have risen significantly.
- 2.26 Most teaching has a strong, positive impact on pupils' learning, increasing pupils' understanding and developing their skills with pace, rigour and challenge. Pivotal to this success are the high level of commitment and support which staff show for their charges, and the level of expertise and passion for their subject which they bring to their lessons. Pupils are encouraged to enjoy their learning. Lessons are well planned and a variety of effective and often inspiring teaching strategies fosters pupils' interest in their work and sets them thinking. Dynamic, targeted teaching on hydrocarbons prompted a heightened sense of curiosity and enquiry amongst Year 10 chemistry pupils, whilst pupils in a sixth-form English lesson, analysing a text by Pinter, were stimulated through the pace of questioning to revisit their interpretations and make wider connections in the genre. When, however, low expectations and a dependence on teacher-led strategies are combined, pupils' frustration restricts their learning.
- 2.27 Most teachers' understand the aptitudes, needs and prior attainment of their pupils and tailor their approaches to enhance the learning of all pupils, especially those with learning difficulties. Many excellent examples were observed of inspirational teaching which challenged all pupils, including the most gifted. In a Year 11 Latin lesson, pupils working on prose unseens were taught techniques for independent learning through auditory, kinaesthetic and visual methods that were enjoyably collaborative and competitive, whilst outstanding interplay between teacher and pupils in a Year 13 lesson on the complex biochemical Calvin cycle stimulated a real delight in learning and a desire on the part of the pupils to rise to the challenge and think things through for themselves. Some inconsistency in following up recommendations from the learning support department undermines valuable work and pupils' sense of involvement in their studies. The progress of gifted and talented pupils is also sometimes restricted by the same work being covered and the same tasks being set for all pupils, leaving open-ended tasks as the only avenue for talented pupils to extend their limits. Teachers' commitment to supporting their pupils' learning leads not only to lunch-time or after-school subject clinics, but also to their giving a great deal of time to enrichment activities such as the imaginative general studies programme and the extensive extra-curricular provision.

- 2.28 Much teaching encourages pupils' increasing ability and inclination to think for themselves. It sets high expectations and encourages a mature, enthusiastic response from the pupils, instilling excellent attitudes to study which form the basis for later success. In a Year 10 physics lesson, the topic of plate tectonics stimulated vigorous debate and was brought to life through excellent resources, elements of drama, and extension into aspects of scientific method and the history of science. In interview, pupils showed a strong awareness of their teachers' encouragement and of the effectiveness of their teaching; they were occasionally critical of disparity in expectation which slowed down their rate of progress. Some inconsistency, as noted in the last report, continues to exist. The school has begun to introduce initiatives aimed at spreading best practice, eliminating any remaining inconsistency and helping heads of department to strengthen academic monitoring.
- 2.29 Increasing numbers and kinds of ICT resources have been provided since the last inspection; inconsistent usage by teachers indicates that staff have not received training to make the best use of them. Draft proposals for the new educational development plan acknowledge that the embedding of ICT within and across the curriculum needs focus and direction.
- 2.30 Standards of marking and assessment are generally very high; the encouragement given and the targets set are rightly much appreciated by pupils. Best practice was observed in the science department's scheme of asking pupils to self-evaluate alongside their teacher's judgement, and in the 'traffic-light' system used to encourage further progress. Positive, frequent and directed assessment becomes, with older pupils, a marking dialogue. Occasionally, pupils' work remains unmarked for some time and examples were also seen of exhaustive correction, which led pupils to incorporate wholesale the comments provided, rather than actively seeking to improve their levels of understanding.
- 2.31 The best assessment is also informed by an awareness of pupils' potential. Information from nationally standardised data evaluating pupils' ability and prior performance is readily available to all teaching staff electronically. Greater use of benchmark material to monitor pupils' academic progress has been encouraged, leading to formal target setting for all Year 12 pupils and similar initiatives in science, design and technology and modern foreign languages lower down the school. Some academic departments also make use of these data sets to inform their planning and curricular arrangements.
- 2.32 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 school provides a high quality of pastoral support and guidance for its pupils, with some outstanding features. It is the major contributing factor to the school's successful achievement of its aim to create an extremely supportive, tolerant environment, in which pupils feel valued and can develop every aspect of their potential. The good features noted in the last report have been strengthened by the introduction of regular, tutorial sessions and of a coherent PSHE programme. The parents' questionnaire showed strong parental satisfaction with the quality of pastoral care provided.
- 3.2 Pastoral care is organised on a house system of four houses, each with a head of house and eight tutors. The deputy head oversees the pastoral side of the school. The lynchpins in the system are the house tutors, first point of contact for both parents and staff, whose job description requires them to develop a relationship of trust and confidence with their charges, getting to know their strengths and aspirations and guiding them to exploiting opportunities for personal development to the full. It is generally accepted that they perform their role very well indeed. They build up excellent relationships with parents and can be easily contacted by e-mail, but a small minority are sometimes lax in responding to communications. In recognition of the supportive nature of tutors' work, tutor time has been enhanced by the allocation of twice-weekly morning sessions, so that they can maintain regular contact with their tutees in a busy schedule. Tutors refer any problems beyond their scope to the heads of house, who offer them informal support and guidance. They also enjoy excellent relations with parents and with their pupils, whom they, like their tutors, know very well. It is also the tutor's job to deliver the excellent PSHE programme, which some do with considerable panache, despite little training being provided and little monitoring occurring. Perhaps because of the latter, some inconsistency in tutorial performance occurs, particularly in areas of academic monitoring, target setting and the delivery of PSHE. With the creation of a sixth-form centre, a head of sixth form has been appointed at senior management level. His input adds another dimension to the structure of pastoral care, but lines of communication and responsibility for sixth-formers are as yet somewhat confused.
- 3.3 Strong stress is laid on pastoral care being the duty of all staff; its success depends on the caring attitude of staff and that is clearly one of the striking features of the school. Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves are outstanding, generating a feeling of mutual trust and respect and an atmosphere in which all feel safe, valued and able to develop their individual talents without fear or favour. This supportive environment leads to outstanding levels of care being provided for pupils with problems. All pupils are discussed in half-termly care list meetings; the progress of those already placed on the list is evaluated and action proposed, whilst others may be entered for the first time. It is an excellent system for dealing with concerns, both academic and pastoral. However, the lack of effective, regular monitoring of tutorial performance, allied to an inconsistent use of preventive systems, including the use of benchmarking, results in proactive care being of somewhat lesser quality than reactive support, to the detriment of some pupils, including those shy of seeking support.
- 3.4 The measures the school takes to promote good discipline and guard against harassment and bullying are effective. Bullying is a rare occurrence but when it does happen pupils are confident that it will be dealt with fairly, swiftly and effectively. The school is successful in encouraging a high standard of pupil behaviour.

- 3.5 Measures to safeguard and promote pupils' health and well being are successful. The medical centre is well equipped and welcoming, run by two matrons who are exemplary in the care they provide. Pupils readily seek their advice and solace. A written first aid policy lays down clear procedures. Seventeen members of staff are qualified first-aiders. Extensive opportunities for pupils to take regular exercise are provided by the extensive range of sporting activities, which attract large numbers of pupils. Pupils' development of healthy eating habits is encouraged by the provision of a salad bar at lunchtime. However, the fare provided in the tuck shop has the opposite effect, and inspectors found that the hot meals served at lunchtime in the dining room do not always promote healthy eating. By contrast, food in the sixth form centre is tasty and wholesome. The pupils' questionnaire revealed that the major concern of pupils in Years 7 to 11 was the quality of the food provided and the problematic queuing system, a view corroborated by inspectors. Responsible dietary habits are covered in Year 7 PSHE lessons.
- 3.6 The school's child protection policy is comprehensive and procedures, including those for safe recruitment of staff, are effective. The policy is reviewed annually by governors, one of whom is designated to oversee how well the related duties are discharged. The child protection officers are appropriately trained and in-service training for all staff is provided at the beginning of each academic year. The attendance and admissions registers are carefully and correctly maintained.
- 3.7 All necessary measures are taken to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards. A recent audit of risk was conducted by external experts in August 2008 and steps have already been taken to address the high and medium priority items raised in the report. The few urgent recommendations have all been followed up. Regular fire drills are held and records kept by the bursar. At the beginning of this academic year, 25 members of staff were trained as fire wardens and their roles are clearly defined.
- 3.8 A comprehensive health and safety policy is published in the staff handbook. The school has due regard for health and safety regulations and all relevant DCSF guidance. The bursar is the school's health and safety officer, although the health and safety committee is chaired by the designated governor with responsibilities in this area. The committee meets termly and a report is made to the governors, who review the policy annually. An educational visits coordinator oversees the safeguarding of pupils' health and safety on educational visits, including risk assessments. All risks on site were evaluated in the most recent health and safety audit, conducted in February and March 2008, which highlighted the action needed to create a safer environment. Steps have been taken to eliminate all high risk items.
- 3.9 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

- 3.10 The school maintains good links with parents and the wider community in line with the school's aims. The effective partnership with parents and the worthwhile links with the community reported at the time of the last inspection have been maintained. In their replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents indicated their strong support of the school in almost every respect.
- 3.11 In academic matters, parents applaud the standards of teaching and the range of subjects offered. They praise the support given to pupils with LDD. In pastoral matters, they are grateful for the help and guidance given to pupils, the high standards of behaviour, the encouragement of worthwhile attitudes and views, and the very good range of extra curricular activities. The inspectors agree with these positive views. A small number of

parents complained that the amount of homework set is excessive; inspectors noted that homework is sometimes unevenly set across the week.

- 3.12 Parents provide good support for concerts, plays and sports fixtures. Some, especially doctors, are involved in educational visits and, as part of the sixth form general studies programme, parents arrange for pupils to gain experience of careers in medicine and veterinary science. A well-established Parents and Teachers Association welcomes new, current and former parents to regular events throughout the year; it provides refreshments at school functions and additional resources to enhance pupils' education, the latter through its fundraising efforts.
- 3.13 The school provides parents with a good range of information from parents' guides, 'mail day' newsletters, termly calendars and the annual magazine. Parents have access to the school's website, but the school recognises that this needs to be improved.
- 3.14 The school produces informative reports for parents once a year, which provide useful information to parents about their children's progress and future targets. These are supplemented by records of pupils' half-termly progress grades, but not all parents find it easy to judge their child's progress from this information. The school provides regular opportunities for parents to meet teachers at parents' meetings and actively encourages informal contact at other times through a child's tutor. A small number of parents commented on how little time they were given to speak to teachers at parents' evenings, as well as on their frequency and timing within the year. The inspectors understood the parents' concerns, but felt that the school was to be commended on the way it made every effort to dovetail reports into the cycle of formal parents' evenings.
- 3.15 On the whole, the school handles the concerns of parents with due care and the great majority of parents expressed confidence in this process. Some parents complained about delays in the response to concerns and the occasional lack of feedback following a complaint. The school is aware of these concerns, and is taking steps to improve this aspect of communication. No formal use of the full complaints procedure has been made in the last three years.
- 3.16 Positive links are promoted with the wider community. A musical outreach programme provides the opportunity for children in local primary schools to come together and sing in the cathedral, performing with the school's talented musicians, and pupils also have very strong links with the Hereford Youth Orchestra. Pupils' art work is displayed in the cathedral supporting the Perpetual Trust exhibition, and in the ophthalmic department of a local hospital. Past and present pupils and parents, and members of staff, join with members of the local community in the Kaloi k'Agathoi theatre company writing and performing Greek plays, as well as offering classical theatre theory and practice for classics pupils.
- 3.17 French and Spanish exchange programmes provide links with communities abroad. The charities committee raises pupils' awareness and organises fund-raising to support charitable causes, most notably in its extensive support for a school in Nepal.
- 3.18 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 The quality of governance is outstanding. Governors give very strong and effective leadership to the school. In doing so, they have enabled the school to continue to meet its aims and to build very significantly on its achievements at the time of the last inspection.
- 4.2 The structure of the governing body is well defined, and its oversight of the school is highly effective. The commitment, experience and skill of governors have underpinned key changes in personnel (at both governance and senior management levels) and a return to financial stability. The sound financial systems, strong financial management and robust controls now in place have allowed the governors to begin a much-needed programme of facilities' development to underpin their strategic development plan. The governors are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds and full use is made of their expertise. The full governing body meets once a term, with an additional strategy meeting in the autumn term. Three appropriate sub-committees, education, finance and general purposes, also meet once a term; a salaries sub-committee meets as necessary. All committees feed through the finance committee to the board, giving the finance committee effective control over expenditure.
- 4.3 Minutes of meetings indicate constant educational debate underpinned by prudent financial oversight, whilst maintaining an appropriate distance from the day-to-day life of the school. New governors are required to attend all meetings of the various committees during their first year, in order to understand governors' various responsibilities.
- 4.4 Governors have demonstrated through a period of very significant change that they have an excellent strategic insight into the working of the school, and the ability to prioritise what needs to be done. The governors are very effective in discharging their responsibilities for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. Individual governors have delegated responsibility for the areas of child protection and health and safety; policies and procedures are reviewed annually.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The school benefits from exemplary leadership which has a clear vision for the school's future development. It has established clear priorities, enabling the school's aims to be ever more successfully fulfilled, despite challenges caused by the need for recent changes in personnel. The quality of management is good overall. Significant progress has been made since the last inspection. A whole school senior management structure, which includes the recently appointed head of the junior school, is enabling greater coordination in terms of policy, curricular progression and planning.
- 4.6 Effective analysis of the school's needs has led to new policies and initiatives, which are bringing positive changes in attitudes towards teaching and learning. A new teaching and learning policy, combined with a performance management system, linked to continuing professional development, has begun to bring about improvements in the tracking of pupils' academic progress and in monitoring of performance by both senior and middle management. Progress is as yet uneven, both in the recognition of the significance of the new policies and in the implementation of performance management. At the same time, significant structural improvements have been made to the school's provision of pastoral care, including the implementation of regular, dedicated tutor time with pupils, whilst retaining and even

- improving its outstanding feature, the supportive relationships which cement the community together.
- 4.7 Academic middle management is shown at its best where departmental leadership engages with the careful monitoring of pupils' progress and also grasps the nettle of effective monitoring of the standards of teaching. However, best practice, as can be seen in science and geography, is not yet followed in all departments and standards of teaching remain inconsistent as a result. To resolve this, two committees have been set up, one to investigate differing learning styles and a greater diversity of teaching strategies, the other to develop the tracking of pupils' academic progress. Where departments have been led to become more reflective practitioners, as in classics, they are enabling their pupils to become more reflective and independent learners.
- 4.8 Pastoral management is committed and supportive. It is well managed by the deputy head. Heads of house and tutors generally do an excellent job in supporting their pupils, but, once again, pockets of inconsistency exist. Senior management is aware that monitoring is not undertaken regularly, and is considering integrating the quality of tutoring into the performance management review, an initiative which has middle management support. Recent developments within the management structure have extended the pastoral care for sixth-form pupils with the appointment of a head of sixth form. Some issues of communication here are not yet resolved.
- 4.9 Senior management has promulgated a comprehensive series of policies and procedures, including effective measures to safeguard pupils' welfare, health and safety; these are evaluated and reviewed annually. A new school educational development plan is in gestation, which proclaims a united vision and common purpose to bring about closer integration of the junior and senior schools, providing a coordinated approach towards the education of pupils from three to eighteen. It builds on initiatives already introduced, such as the creation of a new whole school senior management team and the focus on improving standards of teaching and learning. It aims to create a middle management culture of responsibility and accountability and to encourage the spreading of best practice, including an improvement in ICT provision and its embedding across the curriculum.
- 4.10 The school has successfully deployed a well-qualified staff and has been successful in recruiting experienced teachers to develop senior and middle management following recent departures. Checks are carried out on all staff as part of a carefully monitored appointments process. The performance management system is providing motivation and direction for staff with the setting of focused targets; supportive measures to promote continuing professional development are also being taken. Currently training in lesson observation is underway, because it has been identified that some heads of department are not confident in providing full feedback and follow-up. Procedures for the induction of all new staff, including newly qualified teachers, are thorough and effective.
- 4.11 The school benefits from excellent financial leadership and management. Sound financial systems and robust controls have enabled the provision of some excellent new facilities. Careful financial planning is enabling the school to support a five-year maintenance plan alongside capital projects in order to resolve some remaining renewal still required in certain areas. The curriculum is effectively resourced. The well-equipped and thoughtfully designed library is a very effective resource for learning.
- 4.12 The administration of the school is efficient and effective. Reception and secretarial staff are welcoming and teaching and learning is well supported by a hard-working support staff. An effective appraisal and induction system is also in place for support staff.

- 4.13 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.14 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 Exemplary governance, visionary leadership and a committed, well-qualified staff have together created an extraordinarily supportive environment in which pupils' personal development is nurtured to outstanding levels. Pivotal to this success are the excellent relationships throughout the community, which engender an atmosphere of trust and security conducive to learning. Standards of pastoral care are good overall, and often first-rate; exceptionally caring attitudes are shown by most members of staff. The range and quality of extra-curricular activities are outstanding, notwithstanding the lack of extensive provision for work experience and community service. Good, often inspiring, teaching enables pupils of all abilities to make rapid progress in their studies. However, despite the introduction of a comprehensive performance management review, excellent teaching practice is not sufficiently shared within and between departments, and a lack of regular, effective, formal monitoring by senior and middle management results in some inconsistency in both the academic and pastoral spheres. Policies and procedures are in place to take the school forward, as soon as a full complement of senior managers is in place.
- 5.2 Since the last inspection, a completely new senior management team has been appointed and has begun to establish priorities for development. Initiatives have been taken to improve the quality of pastoral care and to enhance the standards of teaching and learning. Tutors are now allocated regular dedicated time with their tutees, and excellent PSHE and general studies programmes have been introduced. Committees have started looking at learning how to learn and at academic monitoring. A concerted programme to develop the school's facilities has seen the creation of a new sixth-form centre and the provision of an excellent new sports hall and of more science laboratories. Strong financial controls are now in place to underpin and help sustain the school's further development. Recommendations in the last report concerning in-service training, appraisal, marking and communication have been implemented, but no cross-curricular ICT policy is yet in place. The management of teaching and learning by heads of department is still uneven.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no major weaknesses. To improve still further the quality of its educational provision, it should take the following action:
1. disseminate the expertise to be found in the many examples of inspiring teaching and supportive tutoring to enhance the educational experience of all pupils;
 2. ensure that effective monitoring by senior and middle management enables school policies and procedures to be implemented consistently;
 3. consider expanding provision for both community service and work experience;
 4. enhance systematically the quality and quantity of usage of ICT by both staff and pupils across the curriculum.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 3rd to 6th November 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 and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mr John Sugden	Reporting Inspector
Mr John Crampin	Director of Studies, HMC school
Mr Geoffrey Hill	Head of Department, HMC school
Mr Chris Lumb	Head, SHMIS school
Mrs Kate McCarey	Teacher, HMC school
Ms Barbara Pankhurst	Director of Teaching and Learning, GSA school
Mr Douglas Walker	Headmaster, HMC school