

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Oundle School

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

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| Full Name of the School | Oundle School |
| DCSF Number | 928/6007 |
| Registered Charity Number | 309921 |
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| Chairman of Governors | Sir Toby Frere, KCB |
| Age Range | 11 to 18 |
| Gender | Mixed |
| Inspection Dates | 10th to 13th March 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 was carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate. The Ofsted report is available separately at 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.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Oundle School is a boarding and day school for boys and girls between the ages of eleven and eighteen. The school regards itself as a community of pupils, parents, staff and governors. It aims on behalf of its pupils: to promote academic excellence and a respect for the life of the mind; to create informed, confident, enthusiastic, well-rounded and independent young people who have a strong moral sense; to develop leaders and team players, who are at ease with themselves and others; to foster an appreciation and understanding of culture, music, drama and art, and develop creativity; to encourage involvement in exercise and sport as an aid to both physical and mental well-being; to provide an all-round education that includes a variety of outdoor activity-based opportunities to develop character, initiative and enterprise; to uphold the place of Christian worship within the community while respecting members of other faiths; to promote an awareness of current affairs in preparation for making a difference to life in the world beyond Oundle; and to foster a sense of individual and collective responsibility for the school, the town community and the wider world.
- 1.2 The school was established in 1556 when William Laxton, Master of the Worshipful Company of Grocers and Lord Mayor of London endowed and re-founded the original Oundle Grammar School of which he was a former pupil. Between 1876 and 2000 the school operated as two schools. One was called Oundle School. The other was known as Sir William Laxton's Free Grammar School. Co-education was introduced in the 1980s. Until 2000 the two schools were under the governance of the Worshipful Company of Grocers. In 2000 the two schools were once again brought together and the reconstituted school was set up with its own governing body with executive powers. The Worshipful Company of Grocers is represented on the governing body. All governors are trustees of the charity. Governors are invited to join the governing body to add to the range of expertise available for the governance of the school. Laxton Junior School, educating pupils between the ages of four and eleven, is part of Oundle School and is therefore managed and led by the governing body of Oundle School. A sub-committee of the governing body takes special responsibility for the junior school and meets once a term with the chairman, reporting to the full governing body on a regular basis.
- 1.3 The school is set in the town of Oundle, with the school buildings distributed throughout the town. Some of the school buildings have a long history behind them. In addition, purpose built specialist accommodation, some of it very new, has been added over the years. Along with the specialist teaching areas, there is a range of amenities for sport, games and recreation. Many of the building are used by the local community and by parents and pupils at weekends. Some buildings, such as the Stahl Theatre and the Yarrow Gallery, are made available for local and international performances, exhibitions and functions. Since the last inspection in 2002, there has been no change in the nature of the school.
- 1.4 The grouping of pupils in houses gives the framework for pastoral provision, guidance and tutor support. Boarders in Years 7 and 8 are housed in a combined boys' and girls' boarding house. From Year 9 upwards, boarders belong to a boarding house with equal numbers from each age represented in the house. Boys are housed in one of eight boarding houses while the girls are members of one of five boarding houses. Day pupils from Year 7 to Year 13 are members of Laxton, the day pupils' house. In Years 7 and 8 there are 45 girls and 59 boys. In Years 9 to 11, out of 580 pupils, 351 are boys and 229 girls. In the sixth form there are 244 boys and 163 girls. Day pupils make up approximately one-fifth of the total pupil

population. A total of 23 pupils receive Ministry of Defence or Foreign and Commonwealth Office boarding allowance and a further 377 receive some help from the school.

- 1.5 The majority of entrants sit either Common Entrance or the Academic Scholarship examination at the age of thirteen. Those not at a prep school take the school's own entrance examinations. The largest number of pupils enters the school at the start of Year 9. Entry into the sixth form is based on performance at GCSE, with pupils required to show a high level of performance as an indication of their ability to cope with the demands of A-level work. Standardised test results show that the ability range of the pupils is broad, ranging from some very able pupils to those with average levels of ability, with some pupils having learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD). Overall the average ability of the pupils is well above the national average. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results in public examinations will be in line with the average for all maintained selective schools.
- 1.6 There are no pupils with a full statement of special educational need. The school has identified 151 pupils as having LDD. In total, 58 of these are on 'school action' and 93 are on 'school action plus', while 73 receive specialist educational support. There are approximately 94 pupils for whom English is not their first language and 14 of these receive help from the school.
- 1.7 National curriculum nomenclature is used throughout the report to refer to year groups in the school.

| School | NC name |
|-------------|---------|
| 1st Form | Year 7 |
| 2nd Form | Year 8 |
| 3rd Form | Year 9 |
| 4th Form | Year 10 |
| 5th Form | Year 11 |
| Lower Sixth | Year 12 |
| Upper Sixth | Year 13 |

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 Oundle School provides an outstanding range of educational opportunities, suited to the interests, aptitudes and needs of its pupils. In so doing, the school successfully achieves its declared aims to promote academic excellence and a respect for the life of the mind, and to provide an all-round education that includes a variety of outdoor activity-based opportunities to develop character, initiative and enterprise. In the last inspection, the curriculum was judged to be well structured, offering a broad and generally well-balanced education for all age groups and the ability range within the school. It continues to do so.
- 2.2 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 and science, and also information and communication technology (ICT). Specific ICT skills are promoted and put to good use in a number of subjects. The range of subjects available to pupils in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form curriculum is broad and gives pupils a wide choice of subjects and activities 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 the opinions of others.
- 2.3 A fundamental aim of the school is to develop leaders and team players, who are at ease with themselves and others. The high quality of relationships and the experience of working in an environment with a strong community spirit provide many opportunities for pupils to develop as leaders and team players. 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 school. These experiences are explored and articulated in religious education lessons, as well as in the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme of the school.
- 2.4 The educational experience is greatly enhanced by the wide range and the excellent quality of the activities in the enrichment programme, known as Voluntaries. This extensive programme contributes to and refines the skills, knowledge and the personal development of pupils. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DoE) programme and the Combined Cadet Force place pupils in situations where leadership, team working and personal responsibility are key elements and where self-confidence and support for others are developed. Sports activities give many opportunities to develop skills across a wide range of games and sport and to develop a sense of pride in representing individual houses or the school, as well as giving opportunities to improve health and fitness. The involvement of the school in joint activities with the town and with communities in the area broadens the educational experience of pupils. Pupils benefit greatly from their involvement through music with the local community as well as at a national level. The quality and range of performances in the school theatre are further sources of excellent development for pupils as they come in contact with performers and directors who work on a national level. The promotion of local artists and crafts people through exhibitions and workshops brings pupils in contact with a wide range of skills and perspectives. The reach and variety of service that is offered and the degree of challenge to pupils provided by the outstanding Community Action programme form a significant arena in which pupils can develop a sense of responsibility for others.
- 2.5 In addition to the activities in the Voluntaries programme, pupils are given the chance to meet teachers from each of the subject areas outside lessons to pursue further learning, to develop their understanding and skills and to resolve difficulties in their work. The decision

- by pupils to use this academic element in the Voluntaries, illustrates the ways in which the school encourages pupils to be independent and to take responsibility for their learning.
- 2.6 The range and quality of visiting speakers, many with international reputations in their chosen fields, add to the rich educational experience offered to pupils. Expeditions, trips abroad, residential and outward-bound experiences round out an educational programme that is outstanding.
- 2.7 Preparation for examinations and for application to universities and colleges is thorough and offered in a way that supports the aims of the school. The quality and delivery of the programme, supporting pupils in selecting the next step of their education, is an example of best practice and gives pupils an excellent bridge to their future.
- 2.8 The curriculum prepares pupils well for adult life. Pupils develop understanding of key social and personal issues as part of the PSHE programme and through the support and guidance of tutors and house leaders, covering such topics as sex education, drugs, citizenship, relationships, responsibility, leadership and the appropriate safeguards to adopt when using the internet.
- 2.9 Pupils of all abilities, as well as pupils for whom English is not their principal language, benefit from access to the broad range of subjects and activities and from the support provided. Clear profile statements of all pupils who require educational support identify the specific difficulty and outline appropriate responses. Each of these pupils has an Individual Education Programme (IEP) and is given a form of support that is appropriate to their requirements. The educational support programme is of a very high quality. Provision for the gifted and talented is not set up as a separate activity, but is embedded in the many activities and in the Voluntaries programme and so is available to all pupils. The most able pupils have access to a series of extension courses and activities that challenge and extend their understanding and abilities across a wide range of topics.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.11 The quality of pupils' learning and achievements is good. They are well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding, can apply these effectively and can develop the essential skills and attitudes for work and study. The school achieves its aims: to promote academic excellence and a respect for the life of the mind; to create informed, confident, enthusiastic, well-rounded and independent young people who have a strong moral sense; to develop leaders and team players, who are at ease with themselves and others; to foster an appreciation and understanding of culture, music, drama and art, and develop creativity. Results in public examinations continue at the same high level identified in the last inspection and are well above those of maintained selective schools. In all other areas of pupils' performance, the high standards observed in the last inspection have been maintained.
- 2.12 Pupils of all abilities are well educated and achieve good educational standards. Standards in numeracy and literacy are high, as is the development of essential skills for work and study. Their ability in critical and creative thinking is evident in many aspects of pupils' work. Pupils respond positively where they are given opportunities to be critical in their thinking and to be creative in finding solutions to problems. Very good examples were seen of pupils applying their prior knowledge, understanding and skills to support their learning. Pupils are successful in moving to the next stage of their education.

- 2.13 In lessons and in activities, boys and girls of all ages and abilities reach good levels of attainment and make rapid progress. Sometimes their attainment is outstanding. Pupils with LDD make good progress and reach standards that are good for their abilities. This is true also of pupils for whom English is not their first language. More able pupils reach standards that are good for their ability.
- 2.14 Pupils' attainment in GCSE is very good in relation to their abilities. Results in GCSE have been well above the national average for maintained selective schools. Pupils' attainment by Year 13 is very good for their abilities. Results in examinations taken by Year 13 in the three years up to 2007 have been well above the national average for all maintained selective schools. The results achieved by pupils reflect rapid progress in the years leading up to GCSE and especially in the sixth form. On leaving the school pupils are successful in gaining entry to a wide range of courses, mostly to one of the universities of their choice.
- 2.15 Pupils achieve outstanding success in many other areas. The strength of music and drama in the school is reflected in the excellent levels of public performances. Notable success is achieved in mathematics across a wide range of local and national competitions. Major successes in design and technology and in art have marked the performance of pupils in these subject areas. Sports and games are other areas where pupils have enjoyed many successes. For instance, in 2007 the under-fifteen cricket team reached the finals of the Lord's Taverners National Competition, the under-fifteen rugby team reached the semi final of the Daily Mail Cup in 2008 and the under-fourteen girls' hockey team were runners-up in the National Hockey Knockout challenge in 2008. Individual pupils have gained representative honours at county and at national level in a range of games and sports. Each year sees numerous pupils achieving the required standard in the DoE at gold level. The high levels of achievement recorded reflect the success of the school in pursuing excellence for its pupils across a wide range of activities. Through their participation in these, pupils develop leadership skills, work collaboratively, build self-discipline and learn to use their skills to the benefit of others.
- 2.16 Pupils develop as articulate and persuasive communicators. In interviews, pupils proved to be good listeners, taking the point of questions and addressing precisely the issues raised. In lessons they engaged actively in debate with teachers, exploring ideas and offering suggestions and opinions.
- 2.17 Pupils make excellent 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 a similarly good grasp of mathematical understanding.
- 2.18 Pupils' use of ICT is good. The development of ICT skills and the application of pupils' understanding of a broad range of software make them competent in using the range of equipment available to further their learning.
- 2.19 Pupils are good at organising their work. Their written work is well presented. They readily take notes and present their ideas in a cogent and persuasive manner. The use of personal sketchbooks in art is well developed, showing a high level of creative thinking. Pupils' personal notes in design and technology are of a good quality and enhance their work. The same high level of note taking is evident in those subjects where pupils are required to investigate and to collate information.
- 2.20 Pupils' enjoyment is a feature of many lessons, helping to create a positive atmosphere that supports learning. 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

- 2.21 The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is outstanding. The school meets its aims: to create informed, confident, enthusiastic, well-rounded and independent young people who have a strong moral sense; to develop leaders and team players, who are at ease with themselves and others; to foster an appreciation and understanding of culture, music, drama and art, and develop creativity; to uphold the place of Christian worship within the community while respecting members of other faiths; to promote an awareness of current affairs in preparation for making a difference to life in the world beyond Oundle; and to foster a sense of individual and collective responsibility for the school, the town community and the wider world.
- 2.22 In the last inspection, pupils' personal development was considered to be well catered for, but with restricted curriculum opportunities for both personal and social education. These limitations have been overcome and the provision is now of a high quality.
- 2.23 Pupils' spiritual development is outstanding. They combine confidence and a strong sense of self-worth with concern and care for others. This development is a result of the strong sense of community, supportive relationships and the vital contribution of the tutors in the context of pupils' experience of the house system. Pupils learn to reflect, 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. Through participation in the Voluntaries programme they develop self-confidence, acquire a sense of responsibility for the welfare and safety of others, and develop leadership skills. These experiences are further enriched by activities, by chapel assemblies and through interactions with staff who challenge pupils to be independent and confident. 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 work of the chaplains, the central role of the school chapel, through the PSHE programme and through mixing with fellow pupils from different nationalities and world faiths.
- 2.24 Pupils' moral awareness is strong. The behaviour of older pupils is exemplary. They contribute to the smooth running of the house system, providing role models and offering practical support for younger pupils. In interview, pupils said they understood the school's code of conduct and felt it was fair. Misbehaviour is treated fairly and positively in their experience. Pupils' orderly movement around the school showed how well they understood the need to respect rules and behave in a responsible manner.
- 2.25 The generosity of pupils in supporting a broad range of charities reflects their high level of moral awareness. Outreach programmes to the local community, for instance through the DoE scheme, and through the multifaceted Community Action programme, allow practical acts of service that make personal demands on pupils. Extensive fund raising supports the practical involvement of pupils in many projects designed to assist the needy. The Oundle Charity Venturers is an enterprise company run by pupils making a strong contribution to fund raising.
- 2.26 Pupils' social development is outstanding. At all ages, they respond very well to the many opportunities they have to take responsible positions. Being selected as a senior house prefect is valued by pupils and is seen as a way of contributing to the well-being of all members of the house. House activities, particularly the sharing of meals in the boarding houses three times a day, foster a community ethos and a sense of belonging that encourages pupils to take seriously the contribution they are expected to make to the community of the house.

- 2.27 Pupils show an awareness of the wider world in which they live. Citizenship issues are covered well in the PSHE programme and in a range of subjects. In addition, the contact with outside speakers from a wide range of backgrounds, occupations and professions gives pupils a developing awareness of the wider society in which they live.
- 2.28 Overseas pupils enrich the cultural and religious diversity within the school. The ways in which pupils from a variety of backgrounds and cultures mingle promote recognition and acceptance of the differences, and foster harmony. The comprehensive programme of educational visits, including trips to the theatre, art galleries and historical sites, builds pupils' appreciation of and respect for their own traditions and cultures. The many unique and high quality contributions of the music, art and drama departments add great depth to the cultural experiences of pupils. Lessons across a range of subjects and the opportunities for overseas trips deepen pupils' appreciation of differences between peoples.
- 2.29 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.30 The quality of teaching is good. The staff teach their pupils well. Staff successfully meet the aim of the school to promote academic excellence and a respect for the life of the mind.
- 2.31 The good quality of teaching enables all pupils, boys and girls, to acquire new knowledge and make good progress, and to develop their skills according to their ability. Care is taken to ensure that pupils with LDD or English as an additional language (EAL) make good progress according to their ability. The detailed IEPs for these pupils and the support of the specialist teachers in the educational support department can equip teachers with the strategies and techniques to enable pupils to achieve good standards. The more able pupils respond very well to challenging teaching and they make rapid progress.
- 2.32 Constant encouragement of pupils to be creative and critical in their thinking results in excellent learning. In a Year 11 biology lesson, pupils showed considerable mental agility in exploring the factors influencing global warming. They dealt confidently with the information presented to them, applying prior knowledge and understanding to new and challenging situations. In this lesson, the teacher used pupils' suggestions and answers to build a framework of understanding that allowed pupils to develop further insights. In art and in design and technology lessons, the use of skilful questioning techniques by teachers prompted pupils to be self-critical of their work. Discussions between teachers and pupils emphasised the responsibility of pupils to be independent and creative in their approach to their work. The use of humour and the calm approach of teachers created an atmosphere of enjoyment that fully engaged pupils in their learning. The contribution of the academic Voluntaries to developing creative and critical thinking is significant and of an outstanding quality.
- 2.33 Departmental discussions, allied to very high levels of subject knowledge, mean that in the majority of subjects teachers plan and organise their lessons thoroughly and appropriately, making efficient use of resources and time and taking into account pupils' abilities and progress. A key element in the success of the best teaching is the teachers' thorough understanding of their pupils and the high level of focused support given to individuals. Regular testing and assessment activities add to this. A Year 7 pupil observed that he felt teachers were addressing him personally in lessons and were always ready to support and guide him in his work. The variety of materials and equipment, and the quality and quantity of resources provided are very good, and they 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 Outstanding lessons were marked by the imaginative presentation of topics by teachers. Carefully sequenced activities made excellent use of pupils' contributions to build understanding and enabled rapid progress to be made. Pupils were challenged to apply prior knowledge and understanding. They responded enthusiastically to positive teaching that required them to argue cogently and present their views coherently. In lessons where pupils were required to carry out practical activities, they showed an eagerness to think for themselves. The good natured interaction with individual pupils, the variety of activities and the brisk pace of the best lessons promoted outstanding learning.
- 2.35 Occasionally, lessons concentrated too much on explanation and reinforcement of the content, and the teachers provided too few opportunities for pupil participation. Where planning was general, consisting of listing topics from the syllabus, opportunities were lost for enrichment and insufficient attention was given to dealing with the difficulties that pupils encountered. Occasionally, some lessons lacked pace and did not provoke the involvement of pupils that was evident in the best.
- 2.36 Evaluation of performance against national norms is carried out each year on the publication of examination results. Analysis of performances by the director of studies and heads of department provides a good foundation for planning for the future. The tracking of pupils with EAL or LDD is very good. Regular assessment of pupil performance in lessons, in activities and in tests provides a comprehensive profile of pupils. The information gathered is monitored by senior staff and by tutors, and made available to all staff. As a result, in the best lessons, styles of teaching, lesson content and specialised support are adapted to ensure rapid progress by all pupils.
- 2.37 The quality of marking is good. In many subjects detailed written comments and targets are given. When this is allied with good oral feedback on performance, pupils have 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.
- 2.38 The exemplary behaviour of pupils in lessons is a consequence of good teaching and of the outstanding relationships between teachers and pupils, and among pupils themselves. It is evidence of the sense of responsibility that pupils acquire as they mature. In this atmosphere, teachers can promote learning at the highest level.
- 2.39 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

- 3.1 The quality of care for pupils is outstanding. The school fully achieves its aims to create informed, confident, enthusiastic, well-rounded and independent young people who have a strong moral sense, and to develop leaders and team players, who are at ease with themselves and others. The last inspection report commended the quality of care and guidance. It is still a strength of the school.
- 3.2 Staff provide comprehensive support and guidance for all pupils. The house system is the key structure around which the pastoral care of pupils is built and delivered. In the boarding houses, manageable numbers of pupils are gathered together who know each other well. There is a strong family spirit, with each house having a distinct character. The pupils themselves make a significant contribution to the success of the pastoral system through the support and care they show each other and by the spirit they create within the houses. The day house, which has the highest pupil membership, has a correspondingly higher number of tutors who work with pupils on a daily basis. The sense of pride in this house is as strong as in any of the boarding houses. Within the house system, the frequent meetings of tutors and house staff with pupils enable them to know pupils well. These daily interactions give pupils many chances to discuss personal issues and to seek help. Pupils said they had no hesitation in turning to staff for assistance.
- 3.3 Clear pastoral arrangements support staff in the exercise of their responsibilities. The housemasters and housemistresses are responsible for co-ordinating all activities, support, liaison with teaching and support staff, contact with parents and daily supervision, that ensure the well-being and safety of each pupil in the house. The pastoral system is well directed by the second master, who works closely with housemasters and housemistresses to give tutors the guidance and the support they need. All required policies for the pastoral care of pupils are in place and give guidance to staff on how best to serve pupils' needs.
- 3.4 The outstanding quality of relationships between staff and pupils is a key element in creating and sustaining the ethos of the school. The relaxed and friendly manner in which pupils and staff mix permeates every aspect of the life of the school.
- 3.5 Pupils are aware of their responsibility to behave considerately. They are well aware of the anti-bullying stance of the school 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 rarely. Positive teaching in the pastoral programme and practical advice given to pupils highlight the dangers of unwise use of the internet. This advice is backed up by supervised use of the internet in the houses, by monitoring of internet usage and by careful screening of equipment used by staff and pupils.
- 3.6 The school takes appropriate steps to safeguard and promote pupils' well-being. Child protection arrangements are well documented in the staff handbook, expressed in the school policies, known by staff and carefully observed. There are two named persons for child protection who work closely with each other and with the governor responsible for supporting them. The two named persons are properly trained and are completing the extension of their training. Staff training has been carried out appropriately.
- 3.7 Procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety are secure. Risk assessments for premises are thorough and detailed. The school continues to familiarise all staff with the details of the risk assessment procedures. Any pupil taken ill, whether a boarder or day pupil, is treated in

the well-staffed medical centre. Suitably qualified first aiders are readily available throughout the school. The names and locations of these first aiders are clearly posted around the school. The admissions register is well kept. Registration procedures are performed correctly. Lateness and absences are dealt with appropriately. The positive atmosphere and the warmth of welcome afforded day pupils registering in Laxton give them a good start to their day. High levels of attendance allow pupils to benefit from the many experiences the school provides.

- 3.8 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. There is some concern about the risk posed by a narrow and steep stairway in one of the boarding houses. The school is working to remedy this situation. The quality and quantity of the food served in dining rooms across the school are good, with pupils having the opportunity to express an opinion about the food and make requests about the range of menus available. House staff and senior pupils supervise the dining areas, encouraging pupils to eat a balanced diet.
- 3.9 Pupils are encouraged to be healthy through taking part in sports and games. The distances pupils walk between buildings for lessons and activities provide healthy exercise on a daily basis. Further encouragement for healthy exercise is offered through the school's sports programme and the many activities provided throughout the course of the week.
- 3.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.11 The school has a strong partnership with parents and outstanding links with the wider community, which are beneficial to its pupils. The range of these links was recognised in the last inspection. Success in developing these further has enabled the school to meet its declared aim of promoting an awareness of current affairs in preparation for making a difference to life in the world beyond Oundle, and to foster a sense of individual and collective responsibility for the school, the town community and the wider world.
- 3.12 The responses to the parents' questionnaire, completed before the inspection, reflected very 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 issues about insufficient support for pupils with LDD, the manner in which the school handles concerns and the limited range of opportunities for parents to be involved in the life of the school. The inspectors found no evidence to support these concerns. On the contrary, the quality of support for pupils with LDD is well focussed within a clearly established framework and is often of a high order. Anxieties are handled appropriately, with parents having easy access to tutors and house staff. The vast majority of parents complimented the school on the steps it has taken recently to improve communication with them in a more focused manner. The new parent email system is proving to be a worthwhile way of informing parents of all events of interest to them.
- 3.13 Parents are encouraged to be involved in all activities such as sports, assemblies, concerts, drama productions and other school events, and are welcomed to support the work and progress of their children. Many parents respond generously to invitations to share their experience and expertise with pupils, particularly as part of the careers programme. Attendance at exhibitions, performances and festivals as well as at sports and games provide parents with opportunities to meet staff and to show their support for the work of the school.

- 3.14 Newsletters and the regular updating of the website, as well as the regular email of a bulletin giving news and information, are greatly appreciated by parents. Regular reports serve as a good source of information about pupils' progress.
- 3.15 The strongly supportive Laxton Parents' Association and the work of the Oundle Society offer excellent points of contact between the school and the parents, and between the school and former pupils.
- 3.16 The school handles the concerns of parents with care. The school publishes its formal complaints procedure annually. There were three formal complaints in the last academic year. Each of them was dealt with appropriately.
- 3.17 The school takes every opportunity to help pupils be better informed on a broad range of issues and to prepare them for responsible citizenship. As well as visiting speakers and organised discussions on current affairs, positive links have been set up with the local community. The music, art and drama departments take their activities out into the wider community. The design and technology department works closely with a local academy on joint projects. The science department has set up a fellowship that links school science with industry and research. Part of the work of the current holder of the fellowship is to set up visits to industries and work places in the local and regional area, and to link these visits with topics being studied in science. The Community Action programme takes pupils out into the local and regional community. At certain times of the year, the programme takes pupils to work with the needy in Birmingham and London. The personal commitment this programme requires from pupils is one of the key elements in its success in broadening the mind-set of those who participate in it, as well as giving real benefit to the wide range of people and organisations with whom they come into contact. The work of this programme brings pupils into contact with the reality of deprivation as it exists in their society. The level of commitment and the enthusiasm of the pupils for the work are notable characteristics of their involvement.
- 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].

The Quality of Boarding Education

- 3.19 The quality of the boarding experience is outstanding and supports pupils' education, making a significant contribution to the school's aim to develop leaders and team players, who are at ease with themselves and others. The standards of care and welfare in the boarding houses recorded in the last inspection have been exceeded by current provision.
- 3.20 Relationships within boarding are excellent. They are characterised by a high level of tolerance and understanding between staff and pupils, and among pupils themselves. Pastoral staff have created a relaxed and respectful relationship with pupils that is the bedrock on which the success of the provision is built. Senior pupils play an important role in the welfare of the younger pupils by organising house-based activities in sport, music and drama, giving encouragement and acting as role models for them. 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 and the availability of the tutors and support staff.

- 3.21 The range of activities provided for boarders is outstanding, providing a broad and fulfilling school experience through which pupils develop an extensive range of skills and interests. Weekend activities are popular with the junior boarders who talk enthusiastically about visits to recreational places and to the theatre. Boarders are actively encouraged on a daily basis to participate in the broad range of events provided.
- 3.22 Pupils have access to a number of kitchens, to games rooms and to computers. Each house has a variety of rooms where boarders can relax on their own or with friends. The quality of accommodation and resources within the boarding houses is variable, with provision and décor in some of the more recently built or renovated houses outstripping that in some of the others. However, there is a comprehensive development plan to upgrade the provision in all of the houses to the same high standard achieved in the newer ones. The variable quality of the boarding accommodation does not affect the choices made by parents and pupils, underlining the fact that the strength of the boarding community is the people who make it up rather than the buildings in which they are housed.
- 3.23 The areas for improvement identified in the last Commission for Social Care Inspection report have been addressed successfully.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The quality of governance is outstanding. The board of governors has set appropriate aims and values for the school, and provides comprehensive oversight and good guidance. In the last inspection, it was observed that the governors, headmaster and those in management roles worked well together to ensure that the school's academic and educational aims were met, and that a good quality of education was provided. This observation is still true. The breadth of expertise of the governors makes them a valuable resource from which the school draws considerable benefit.
- 4.2 The structure and management arrangements relating to the governors are well defined and allow them to have a strategic overview of the school. There is a clear demarcation between the role of the governors in the management of the school and the role of the headmaster that allows him to exercise his responsibilities properly. Regular communications between the headmaster and the governing body give governors the information they require to be fully conversant with the operation and successes of the school. 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 school. Governors are involved appropriately in the preparation and review of all policies. A 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, such as child protection, which they carry out in a purposeful manner. They are actively involved with staff leading those areas within the school.
- 4.4 Most of the governors' deliberations take place at governing body meetings held four times a year. Some of the heavy workload of these meetings is eased by the activities of the various sub-committees and by the work of the committee for Laxton Junior School. Key staff are invited to full meetings of the governing body to discuss the work of the school. At various times of the year, governors meet informally with staff to discuss issues and to expand governors' understanding of the work of the school.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The quality of leadership and management of the headmaster and the senior management team is outstanding.
- 4.6 Clear educational direction and leadership are provided by those with senior management responsibilities, as reflected in the quality of education, the care of pupils and the achievement of the school's aims. Housemasters, housemistresses and heads of subject departments respond positively to the opportunities offered to them to lead and manage colleagues. The future direction and development of the school, as expressed in the school development plan, are based on a clear understanding of the school's key strengths and identified areas for development. This plan in particular has set priorities at raising the academic profile of the school and developing further its involvement in international education and local education partnerships. Staff are actively engaged in reviews and analysis of performance and are active participants in the decision making process of the school.

- 4.7 The school has a clear view of its strengths and of its areas for development. Focused planning is based on stringent analysis of performance and wide discussion of proposals involving all staff. Carefully elaborated strategies ensure delivery of the objectives set for development. Sound and prudent financial advice and control led by the bursar underpin the development process. Formal and informal whole-school monitoring takes place, with careful analysis of pupil performance, scrutiny of tests and formal assessments, and the involvement of teachers and tutors giving the monitoring the substance it needs to be of benefit to the pupils. Senior staff monitor and lead reviews of the impact of all policies and procedures.
- 4.8 The quality of leadership and management at middle management level is generally of a very high standard, with comprehensive planning and support for teaching and learning that go beyond giving lists of topics to be covered. The needs of pupils, especially those with LDD, are identified and a considered response is established that meets their requirements. Guidance and support for teachers are clearly expressed in departmental handbooks that are useful reference points. Peer review is carried out on an informal basis, with action taken as a result of the insights gained. Structured training and development are provided that enrich the professional development of teachers. Where leadership and management in some departments fall below that high standard, it is due to confusion over responsibilities, departmental handbooks that are vague and general in their guidance, and an approach to teaching that does not take proper account of the carefully identified requirements of pupils with LDD.
- 4.9 Management is successful in securing, supporting, developing and motivating high quality staff. The school has a rigorous 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. Lesson observation, mentoring and the spreading use of peer review are proving to be useful tools for professional development. Support staff have embarked on a high quality, comprehensive development programme with training on issues to do with health and safety, and child protection legislation.
- 4.10 Finances are very well managed so that appropriate resources are provided. The high level of maintenance of the buildings and the addition of high quality specialist teaching accommodation have provided pupils with an attractive and stimulating environment. Teaching resources are sufficient for the needs of good teaching. The well-stocked library is a valuable asset for private research and study as well as providing a quiet haven for personal reading.
- 4.11 The administration of the school is very good. The administrative, catering and maintenance staff contribute to achieving the aims of the school through the range and quality of their work. Their commitment to the success of the school makes a real contribution to the community atmosphere of the school.
- 4.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.13 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 The school is successful in meeting its aims. It provides a rich and comprehensive educational experience that is of considerable benefit to each of its pupils. Pupils make rapid progress in all aspects of their learning and development, and achieve very high levels of attainment in public examinations and in a wide range of activities. The quality of personal development is outstanding. Pupils themselves make a positive contribution to the vibrant life of the school. The house system is the cornerstone on which much of the work and success of the school are built. House staff and tutors provide guidance and support, and build a sense of community that nurtures the development of pupils. Staff are most generous in giving their time and expertise outside formal lessons to enhance the learning and the development of pupils. Worthwhile links with the wider community through many activities and joint ventures enrich pupils' education. The leadership and management create an outstanding educational experience that meets the aims of the school. Governors, in partnership with the leadership of the school, exercise a strategic leadership role that is taking the school forward.
- 5.2 Most of the issues raised at the last inspection have been successfully addressed. The provision of personal and social education has been greatly improved. The school library is well used for personal study and private reading. The teaching areas are well appointed and provide a good environment in which pupils are taught. Health and safety procedures have been well established. Positive links with Laxton Junior School are well developed through a series of activities and meetings. The school is clearly aware of its strengths and of its areas in need of development. The procedures for analysing and responding positively to identified need are in place.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 In order to improve further, the school should consider the following steps.
1. Continue to familiarise all staff with the details of the risk assessment procedures.
 2. Continue to improve the quality of housing in all boarding areas.
- 5.5 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 10th to 13th March 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. 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 National Minimum Boarding Standards were inspected by a team of three Ofsted inspectors over four days.

List of Inspectors

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Mr Edward Dunphy | Reporting Inspector |
| Mr Darren Ayling | Deputy Headmaster, HMC school |
| Mrs Jenny Longbourne | Former Head of Department, GSA school |
| Mr Stephen Smith | Headmaster, HMC school |
| Dr Helen Brooke | Deputy Principal, HMC/GSA school |
| Mr Trevor Chilton | Head of Department, HMC school |
| Mrs Sandra White | Headmistress, GSA school |
| Mr Martin Bates | Head of Department, IAPS/ISA school |