

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Laxton Junior School

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

Full Name of the School	Laxton Junior School
DCSF Number	928/6051
Registered Charity Number	309921
Address	East Road, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 4BX.
Telephone Number	01832 277275
Fax Number	01832 277271
Email Address	scat@laxtonjunior.org.uk
Headmistress	Miss Susan Thomas
Chairman of Governors	Sir Toby Frere, KCB
Chairman of Junior School Committee	Mr Nick Cheatle
Age Range	4 to 11
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 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 Laxton Junior School was founded in 1973 as part of the Oundle School foundation; it prepares pupils primarily to move to Laxton, the day house of Oundle School, but also prepares pupils for other secondary schools in the area. The school moved in September 2002 to purpose-built premises and doubled in size to become a two form entry school educating pupils from the ages of four to eleven. As the school has grown the curriculum has expanded as has the programme of extra-curricular activities.
- 1.2 Laxton Junior School and Oundle School share one governing body. There is a specific junior school committee, which is formed from within the overall main board. The chairman of this committee reports directly to the whole board.
- 1.3 At the time of inspection, there were 251 pupils on roll in the school (121 boys and 130 girls). Pupils are drawn mainly from professional homes near Oundle, but the catchment area spreads as far as Peterborough, Stamford, Kettering, Corby, Oakham and Huntingdon. Entry at four is non-selective, informal assessment is used to determine a child's readiness for school and pupils have a broad range of ability on entry, which is well above the national average. Elsewhere in the school, admission follows a full day in school to evaluate potential and suitability for the curriculum, which includes looking at ability in mathematics, English, verbal reasoning and reading.
- 1.4 The analysis of standardised tests provided by the school shows that pupils' average ability is well above the national average. If pupils perform in line with their ability, their results will be well above the average in maintained primary schools. There are two pupils for whom English is an additional language. One pupil has a statement of special educational need and in addition, fifty-one pupils receive formal learning support. At the end of Year 6 the majority of pupils transfer to the senior school, and the remainder usually go to other independent schools or the local state middle school.
- 1.5 Since the last inspection a major building project was launched. This has resulted in a new purpose-built junior school, significantly enhancing all facilities. The governors have made significant investment at Laxton Junior School and have plans to do even more.
- 1.6 The school aims are to identify and foster every pupil's talents, encouraging them to be self-confident and to learn a sense of value. Staff aim to achieve excellent results through a broad and enriched curriculum, whilst maintaining a happy atmosphere through discipline, consideration for others and a good sense of community.
- 1.7 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 by Laxton Junior School is excellent. The high quality of the educational experience offered by the school is well suited to the needs, aptitudes and abilities of all pupils. The firm foundations provided through the curriculum and the outstanding programme of activities prepare pupils extremely well for the next stage of their learning. The careful academic preparation and nurturing of personal development throughout the school from Reception upwards result in happy, friendly children. Pupils are encouraged to set their aspirations high. The atmosphere and ethos of the school are such that all pupils flourish in a community to which they contribute greatly. The new purpose-built school provided since the last inspection has significantly enhanced provision for every aspect of education, whether social or academic.
- 2.2 The education as a whole gives pupils strong experience in, and contributes effectively to, a broad and deep range of learning, whether related to linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development, or to the acquisition of skills in speaking and listening, literacy and numeracy. The wide-ranging curriculum stimulates pupils and successfully meets their needs. It underpins the school's aim of being a place of encouragement. The outstanding quality of artwork and the many opportunities offered to take part in musical activities and speech and drama are clear evidence of how well the school nurtures pupils' aesthetic and creative skills. An effective balance is struck between academic provision and the opportunities offered by the extra-curricular programme. The Early Learning Goals in the Reception classes and, in Years 1 to 6, the subjects of the National Curriculum, together with religious studies (RS) and personal, social and health education and citizenship (PSHCE), provide a sound foundation for learning. Drama, French, study skills and current affairs, in Year 6, add breadth as the pupils move through the school. The programme of music within the school is exceptional, with over two-thirds of the pupils playing at least one musical instrument, some to a very high standard. The strings' programme, where every pupil in Year 2 plays either cello or violin, is a tribute to the dedication, enthusiasm and expertise of the music staff. This programme is directly responsible for the pupils' love of music and their desire to continue playing musical instruments as they progress through the school.
- 2.3 The quality and breadth of the activities programme is outstanding. Within their activities, pupils participate enthusiastically, concentrate hard and are physically and intellectually challenged. The enthusiasm of pupils is evident in the animated way in which they talk about their enjoyment of their chosen activities. The scope and quality of these greatly enrich the life of the pupils. Sixty-six pupils play chess, of whom twelve are county players.
- 2.4 The formal curriculum is enhanced by a varied programme of visits, visitors and events which serve to extend pupils' learning. The recent Arts Festival enabling all pupils to experience a week dedicated to every aspect of the arts, culminated in a showcase for over 300 parents on the final afternoon; it was described by staff and parents as exceptionally successful.
- 2.5 There are many educational visits, both day and extended. During the course of the year, pupils perform in school plays and concerts, extend their oral skills through speech and drama, and represent the school in a wide variety of sports. There are extended educational visits to an adventure activity centre and a residential trip to France. The school is developing links with a school in Thailand; some pupils and staff from that school have

- already visited Laxton and it is hoped that a visit will be reciprocated during the next academic year.
- 2.6 The school meets the curricular needs of the full range of ability, including those of pupils requiring support, and those who are more able. Once pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) have been identified and assessed, they receive one-to-one support, small group support or in-class support. This provision is available to all pupils who need it. Individual education plans are drawn up by the qualified special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), who liaises with class teachers. This system is thorough and fully supports the needs of all pupils. Pupils who are gifted and talented are identified through a wide variety of measures to ensure that opportunities for them are provided. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the curriculum.
- 2.7 Links with the community and the outstanding range of extra-curricular activities contribute strongly to pupils' educational experience and achievement. The pupils participate enthusiastically in music, sport, dance and drama as well as flower arranging, cookery and chess. Choices are monitored to ensure pupils have a variety of different experiences over time.
- 2.8 Preparation for the next stage of education is very well managed. Parents are closely involved in their children's future at all the appropriate stages. Year 6 pupils are thoroughly prepared for entrance examinations to the senior school and to other schools.
- 2.9 The curriculum enables pupils to increase their knowledge and understanding in an orderly and progressive manner. High quality, well-written curriculum documents provide for continuity and underpin work at every stage. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and revised in the context of the school's strategic plan and the needs of the pupils. All pupils have equality of access to the curriculum.
- 2.10 The arrangement to support pupils with LDD is outstanding. The identification of difficulties by specialist teachers and the caring support provided ensure that pupils are given every opportunity to overcome their difficulties and to develop self-confidence and make progress. The youngest, for instance, may have five minutes of reading or phonics practice daily. Older pupils may have longer sessions once or twice a week. The school also makes good provision for the most able pupils who may be advanced a year if it is felt that this will benefit them. Other pupils, who may be gifted at specific subjects, are given enrichment activities and extended work by subject teachers.
- 2.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.12 At all ages and for all abilities, pupils show outstanding learning and achieve excellent standards in all areas of the curriculum. High levels of skill and knowledge, and good levels of understanding are developed both in the classroom and in the extensive range of excellent activities offered by the staff; these standards are achieved as a result of the detailed planning and high expectations set by teachers. Pupils are encouraged to develop and apply these skills critically and creatively in all subjects.
- 2.13 Pupils benefit from an attractive learning environment, enriched by a mixture of high quality displays of their work and informative posters, which develop their creative and critical thinking skills. The relationship between the staff and the pupils is one of mutual respect; pupils feel secure and happy in their lessons and, as a result, settle quickly and enthusiastically to all tasks.

- 2.14 Pupils are highly articulate and have access to extensive vocabulary. In a Year 3 lesson, where pupils were discussing the properties and uses of stone, it was agreed that 'stone steps need to be sturdy'. In a Year 6 current affairs lesson where pupils spoke about topical news, pupils asked intelligent questions to help further their own understanding whilst listening to others. In a Year 5 science lesson, one pupil asked why sounds can be of different pitch and another answered by drawing on her knowledge of playing a stringed instrument to explain how the thickness of the string changes the pitch.
- 2.15 The new reading time each day helps to foster pupils' love of books, which is evident in their own imaginative and creative writing on display around the school. Pupils have a good understanding of mathematics and apply numeracy skills effectively.
- 2.16 The excellent information and communication technology (ICT) suite is well equipped and used extensively. The pupils are competent in the use of ICT, but the development of ICT skills across the curriculum is not fully embedded in all subjects and at all ages.
- 2.17 Over the whole ability range, pupils' attainment is good in relation to their abilities. Lower ability pupils are well supported by their teachers. Results in national tests at the end of Year 6 are consistently far above the national average for maintained primary schools. Well over three-quarters of the pupils gain entry to their first choice senior school and some win academic awards to Oundle and other senior schools each year. The exceptional standards in music are reflected in the large number of music scholarships and exhibitions.
- 2.18 Every pupil has the opportunity to achieve personal success in at least one or more areas and is encouraged to do so. They clearly love their school and enjoy all opportunities afforded to them. They take pride in their achievements, and initiatives such as fundraising for charities can be initiated by the youngest pupils, for example the 'Rainforest Café', developed in response to a Year 2 pupil's request to help the environment. Achievements in sport, such as the U11A netball team reaching the Independent Association of Preparatory Schools finals or twelve pupils playing chess at county level, provide evidence of the excellent standards achieved across the school.
- 2.19 Pupils reason cogently and can respond to searching questions. They can work things out for themselves and can argue with conviction. They have competent study skills, developed through opportunities to research and to make notes. These skills are fostered most notably in Years 5 and 6, when pupils develop strategies including those for time allocation and revision. Such skills enable them to organise their work independently and to work co-operatively when they are required to do so. This, alongside exemplary behaviour and a positive approach, contributes to effective learning and the achievement of high standards, both individually and as members of teams. Pupils arrive promptly for lessons, settle quickly and apply themselves with good levels of perseverance. In interviews, all pupils said they enjoyed their lessons.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.20 The quality of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. It is strongly nurtured in all years and meets the school's overall aims.
- 2.21 The school places strong emphasis on the spiritual development of its pupils and strives to inculcate them with a culture of self-worth, honesty, respect and courtesy. The excellent provision for spiritual development is extensive, whether through assemblies or through the many opportunities offered through the curriculum. World faiths are explored by older pupils, Islam in Year 5 and Judaism in Year 6, and major religious festivals celebrated by the infants, for example Holi in Year 1. Spirituality is nurtured by a culture of positive praise, valuing the individual and respecting the needs of others. Pupils in a Year 1 class listened respectfully to a personal account of celebrating a religious festival. The school draws much from its Christian foundation, with Christian festivals celebrated at the Oundle chapel and the parish church. The local clergy visit the school regularly to take assemblies or to take RS lessons. Up to two-thirds of the pupils take part in the summer holiday club 'Chatterbox', run by the local combined Christian youth ministry teams.
- 2.22 Teachers support this strong ethos in their teaching, for example in a Year 6 current affairs lesson where pupils spoke honestly about their feelings about bullying. Pupils have a strong sense of belonging to a community. Teachers develop pupils' self-esteem and confidence in many ways including verbally praising each step of achievement, through stars of the week awards and prizes for effort and achievement. The importance of sharing was enhanced in an infant assembly on the story of *The Selfish Giant*. The creative and aesthetic aspects of lessons in art, drama and music touch pupils' emotions and are both uplifting and inspiring. Pupils sing with self-confidence and delight, whether in music lessons, assemblies or choir practices. All pupils are encouraged to research and identify charities as the focus for regular house fundraising events and through this the school promotes an awareness of responsibility to others.
- 2.23 Provision for pupils' moral awareness is outstanding. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong from an early age and develop sound morals through effective guidance by teachers, all led by the headmistress. In interviews, pupils appreciated the necessity of rules and displayed a thorough knowledge and respect for them. Moral dilemmas and solutions are discussed in current affairs lessons, in assemblies or in PSHCE lessons. The infant classes expressed empathy for a fictional character, and Year 6 expressed mature views and feelings about the ethics of a news item. A Year 6 English class discussed why people felt the need to swear and the range of human emotions people felt in confrontational situations.
- 2.24 Adults in the community set a good example for their pupils, feeling no need to raise their voices to command attention or correct mistakes. Pupils engage in fair play in the playground and the same spirit pervades inter-house sports matches. Pupils are always courteous and give way to adults at doorways and on the stairs. Year 6 pupils revealed in interview a mature response to dealing with any unhappy youngsters in the playground. The very active 'Green Team' promotes environmental issues for the school to consider and has developed a conservation garden for all to enjoy.
- 2.25 The social awareness of pupils is excellent. Ample opportunities are created to bring the school together as a community. Worship and celebration of success in assemblies, team games, concerts, plays, clubs and form time all play their part. Membership of one of the four houses increases loyalty and promotes the ambition to win house points. Regular elections to the School Council encourage the democratic process. Year 6 pupils in interview reported that decisions made by the body were effective and that senior managers had heeded their opinion. The consequent trust in pupils' social potential sees them take responsibility as

house captains, team captains, or helpers at lunch or at line up for the younger classes. Social courtesies are inculcated early, for example with Reception class children thanking a classmate, unprompted, for holding a door open for them. Pupils work extremely well together, as in music lessons in Years 5 and 6, and in Year 4 netball warm-ups.

- 2.26 Other contributions to community life include holding house cake stalls for charity, or working together for the recent Arts Festival. Lessons reinforce international awareness such as Year 6 geography work on Africa and Year 4 work on Indian clothes and food. Pupils assisted the senior school in supporting a school in Kenya, and older pupils in particular have an excellent knowledge of local services, public institutions and current affairs.
- 2.27 Pupils have had the opportunities to attend residential trips to France. They also have the opportunity to listen to speakers from other ethnic or religious traditions. A Reception pupil thanked her teacher in Spanish when he led her across the zebra crossing from lunch. Pupils acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures in a manner that promotes tolerance and harmony between different traditions. They study four different faiths in their RS lessons. The school uses visual images of different ethnic and cultural traditions to reinforce its teaching. African folk music performed by Year 6 and Tudor music in Year 5 further illustrate cultural enrichment. Performances and visits to concerts and drama productions are enjoyed by pupils and parents alike.
- 2.28 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.29 The overall quality of teaching is good, with a significant number of lessons seen being outstanding. Teaching encourages pupils to think and find things out for themselves; it fully supports the aims of the school and enables pupils to make progress and achieve standards according to their ability. It is effective in providing a secure foundation for pupils to acquire new knowledge, make progress, increase their understanding and develop their skills. A great strength of teaching is the individual and group support given to pupils in a caring way.
- 2.30 Teaching and support of pupils with LDD is outstanding. The committed and highly experienced SENCO liaises closely with teachers, parents and outside specialists, monitors pupils' progress and provides excellent support and advice. Extra opportunities and challenges are provided for very talented pupils in many subjects; examples of excellent practice were observed in music, sport and mathematics.
- 2.31 Teachers have high expectations and pupils respond positively, showing interest, effort, perseverance and pride in their work. Teachers' own subject knowledge is secure. In the best lessons, teachers differentiated carefully, used pace and variety to stimulate thinking and maintain interest, and explained and reinforced the learning objective. The many outstanding lessons invariably included high quality dialogue which stimulated thinking and encouraged exploration and explanation. Examples include a Year 2 creative writing lesson, where pupils were writing a letter as Florence Nightingale and focusing on writing in the first person. Metaphorical 'magic dust' was sprinkled on the pupils to turn them into Florence, and they then produced good pieces of writing which incorporated the many adjectives drawn out in the oral session.

- 2.32 In the infant department, a dynamic and effective daily programme of movement stimulates the children at the start of the day and prepares them for learning. Pupils are screened in Reception and monitored subsequently by the SENCO; support is provided for those who need it. From Year 1, standardised tests are used to evaluate pupil performance against national norms, measure progress and diagnose areas of weakness. This information is used by the director of curriculum and subject co-ordinators to develop the curriculum and to develop subsequent planning at both individual and group level.
- 2.33 There is a plentiful supply of first class resources, and all are used well. Areas of particular note are the library, the ICT suite and the main hall, all of which are stocked with excellent resources for teaching and learning. Modern ICT resources are limited in the classrooms. Where they are provided they are used well. For example, an inter-active whiteboard (IWB) was used most effectively in a mathematics lesson by the pupils to investigate the rotation of shapes around a vertex, and Reception children interacted with the IWB to play 'phonics bingo'. Learning objectives are used in all subjects and stages, and 'we are learning to' statements are written on whiteboards and worksheets.
- 2.34 Teaching includes regular and thorough assessment of pupils' work. Assessment, which includes the use of standardised tests, as well as the school's own assessments, is efficiently used. Teachers ensure that pupils' progress is carefully monitored and appropriate records are kept. The information provided through assessment is used to plan lessons, as well as to identify those who need additional help and support. Teachers are conscientious about marking. Marking offers praise and encouragement. Particularly good examples provide pupils with comments on how best to improve their work. Targets are set in many subjects and are monitored and reviewed by form teachers and subject co-ordinators. An excellent system for tracking progress has been developed for boys' games. To improve the effectiveness of assessment, the school has plans to acquire and develop more sophisticated diagnostic software, however management time and scheduled staff meeting time for assessment purposes is at the moment limited.
- 2.35 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 care devoted to pupils and the attention to welfare, health and safety are outstanding. Staff know their pupils well and the very positive relationships between staff and pupils promote effective learning in a caring environment which assists the school in the fulfilment of its aims.
- 3.2 The senior mistress co-ordinates pastoral care, but form teachers are responsible for day to day care. Teachers take their roles seriously. They track pupils' progress to ensure that those who need extra help receive support. The headmistress holds regular conferences with parents who need more detailed discussions about their children's progress. Pupils said that they felt well supported by their teachers who give them praise, encouragement and advice. They felt they could go to any member of staff if they had a problem. Pupils also said they like the 'Buddy' system because they knew that they would have a friend if they needed one. The parental handbook gives clear and comprehensive guidance on the code of behaviour and welfare, health and safety.
- 3.3 The excellent relationships between staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves are based on mutual trust and respect. They show care and concern for each other. This includes supporting individual pupils with specific learning difficulties or disabilities.
- 3.4 Pupils are familiar with the code of behaviour and know what is expected of them. Responsible behaviour is promoted through the very positive encouragement they receive from their teachers, through the house point system and the certificates they receive in assembly. The anti-bullying policy operates effectively because pupils know that bullying will not be tolerated, but that they will be listened to and well supported should it occur.
- 3.5 The school has appropriate policies and procedures in place for child protection. The child protection officer has attended a multi-agency training course and all staff know what action must be taken should a concern arise. A member of the governing body has responsibility for liaising over child protection matters.
- 3.6 All necessary measures have been taken to minimise risk from fire and other hazards. Regular fire drills are carefully recorded. The one held during the inspection was judged to be excellent. The school has appropriate policies and procedures that fulfil the legal requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.
- 3.7 Arrangements to ensure health and safety are effective. The school has a designated medical room and suitable arrangements are made for pupils who are ill during the day. The school doctor and sanatorium staff are available to give advice on health matters. The school operates strict procedures for the administration of medicines. First aid boxes are located around the school and four members of staff are trained in first aid.
- 3.8 Risk assessments for off-site visits are completed and there are clear guide lines to be followed by those who drive the mini-bus. Admissions and attendance registers are completed accurately. Plenty of opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in physical activities, indoors and out. They know that it is necessary to maintain a healthy life style by taking adequate exercise and eating a healthy diet.

- 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 quality of links with parents and the community is outstanding. The school works in partnership with parents to provide the highest quality of education for its pupils and ensure that they lead confident, fulfilling and challenging lives, in line with its aims.
- 3.11 A high proportion of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that they were extremely pleased with the quality of education provided by the school. They singled out for particular praise the quality of teaching, the range of subjects offered, the help and guidance given to their children and the promotion of worthwhile attitudes and values. Links between Laxton Junior School and Oundle School have been strengthened by the formation of the Laxton Junior Oundle Committee which meets termly.
- 3.12 Parents of pupils of all ages are given many worthwhile opportunities to become involved in the activities of the school and in the work and progress of their children. The school warmly welcomes parents to concerts, drama productions, sports matches, the annual Prize Giving and the Christmas Carol Service. Parents with a particular skill or interest are encouraged to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with pupils in activities such as the cookery club, Braille club, science club and swimming lessons.
- 3.13 The Parents and Friends Association is lively, involving parents in events such as the Christmas social with staff, parents' quiz, monthly coffee mornings, charity events and the 'welcome' social for new parents. Parents are able to make suggestions to the school, for example the need for a bike shed, which is now in situ, and the adoption of house T-shirts, which are now sold through the school.
- 3.14 Parents are kept regularly informed through a range of well-produced, informative documents. These include newsletters, the school magazine, new parent information booklets and the parental handbook. The new system of parent email, whereby all notices and letters go from school to home electronically, enables parents to keep up to date with the life of the school. It provides useful insight into the work of the school and the activities taking place. Parents have the opportunity to meet teachers before or after school to share information and discuss concerns. Reports on pupils' work and progress are thoughtfully written and show a deep understanding of pupils. They include comments on achievement and target setting.
- 3.15 The school takes parents' concerns seriously and detailed records are kept. The complaints procedure is made available to all parents.
- 3.16 The school works hard to develop a strong network of community links and seeks to maintain and strengthen them. These include: a link with a nearby junior school to look at Early Years and assessment, where shared aims and policies are formulated, discussed and evaluated; and strong links with local nurseries, in particular the one adjacent to the school, who also offer aftercare to Laxton Junior School pupils. In addition, Oundle Town football junior teams use the school pitches on some Saturdays, and the school hall has hosted the Oundle Festival of Literature's family day, and been used by The Rotary Club of Oundle and the local church. Local senior citizens are invited to concerts, and given tea afterwards, and the school also hosts two tournaments a year: netball in November and football in March, attended by up to seven schools, both state and independent. The positive impact this contact has on the pupils helps develop their awareness of the world around them.

- 3.17 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 school is exceptionally well governed by the board which has overall responsibility for Oundle School and Laxton Junior School. The governors have put in place a committee structure that enables them to be aware of, and oversee effectively, the management of the school. The Laxton Junior School committee meets once a term and presents its agendas and minutes to the whole board at their termly meeting. Their work is widely recognised and makes a significant contribution to the school's success in achieving its aims. Governors provide clear strategic aims for the school, and, over the years, have had a strong influence on its development.
- 4.2 Governors have a clear recognition of their responsibilities, are hard working and are deeply committed to the school. They audit their own performance annually to assess their effectiveness as governors. The headmistress, together with the headmaster of Oundle School and the bursar, provides high quality information on which governors base decisions about educational development, financial planning and the investment of resources. Governors also monitor their statutory responsibilities, including those for child protection and health and safety. The board has expertise in all areas of governance, enabling governors to contribute effectively to discussion and debate on a wide range of topics. Newly appointed governors receive appropriate induction training.
- 4.3 The chairman of the Laxton Junior School committee is in regular touch with the headmistress. He has a wide knowledge of the school. Good relationships between the governors and staff are carefully fostered. Governors have regular opportunities to meet and listen to staff. They visit the school frequently, and observe lessons and attend extra-curricular activities, in addition to supporting concerts, drama productions, sports fixtures and other major events. The chairman has taken school assembly. Through these opportunities, governors have a good grasp of what is going on, enabling them to provide the headmistress and staff with appropriate support, advice and challenge.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.4 The headmistress provides clear direction and leadership for the school. Her administration and strategic planning skills are of a high order. She ably leads an effective senior management team (SMT), who together contribute strongly to the breadth and quality of education provided, the care of pupils and the promotion of the school's aims and ethos. A commitment to maintaining high standards and to providing a broad and comprehensive education permeates all aspects of the school's work.
- 4.5 Good practices exist for analysing the school's needs, setting priorities and putting decisions into practice, and consultation is a strong feature of all decision making. The school is beginning to develop a cycle of planning, monitoring and review, leading to annual priorities being drawn up by staff and governors. Supporting documentation is of good quality and confirms the school has a secure understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The SMT are aware that in-service training and staff development and appraisal are areas for future development. Subject co-ordinators lead and manage their own areas effectively and are directly involved with curricular planning.

- 4.6 Procedures for managing the school are well defined. The headmistress is a member of the Oundle SMT, which helps to ensure both schools work as a cohesive whole. She also sits on governors' sub-committees and is, therefore, well informed about whole-school matters.
- 4.7 All policies are reviewed annually and, where necessary, revised, before being submitted to the governors' policies committees. Staff handbooks give detailed information and, together with well-considered policies, guide staff in all important areas of their work.
- 4.8 The staff are of a high quality, and the procedures for appointing and deploying them are effectively managed and supported by appropriate documentation. The required checks are made on all staff before an appointment is confirmed and proper records are kept. Newly qualified teachers are registered on the national scheme and the necessary arrangements are being observed. A good system of induction operates for new members of staff, who feel well supported and made welcome. The appraisal system is being developed.
- 4.9 Financial control and planning are good. The provision of resources supports teaching and learning, and the needs of the pupils. The accommodation and grounds are maintained to a high standard.
- 4.10 The administration of the school is efficient and supports staff well in their work. The smooth running of the school owes much to the hard working administrative staff. Support staff provide dedicated and often unobtrusive assistance for the work of the school, and all are committed to its ethos and success. Visitors to the school are given a positive, and personal, welcome to the school.
- 4.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.12 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 High quality governance and the strong leadership of the headmistress, together with her senior colleagues, ensure that the school fully meets its aims. Pupils achieve good and frequently outstanding standards in their academic work and in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including drama, music and sport. Such achievement results from high quality teaching and effective systems which support pupils in their learning. Pupils of all ages are well motivated and approach school life with enjoyment. Their personal development is outstanding. Good relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils themselves combine to develop children who are articulate, thoughtful and confident. The staff provide a supportive atmosphere in which pastoral care is outstanding and every pupil feels respected and valued. Parents are extremely satisfied with the education provided and pupils are appreciative of the opportunities which are made available to them.
- 5.2 The school has made significant progress since the last inspection, notably with the new building and resources to support the curriculum. The one recommendation made at the time of the last inspection, which concerned reviewing structures for co-ordinating subjects, has been fully met. The school is constantly looking to make further improvement, through self-evaluation, and is aware that the application of ICT needs to be extended in all areas of the curriculum.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no significant weaknesses but attention to the following will help further development:
1. continue to implement the main priorities of the Laxton Junior School Strategic Plan.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

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. The responses of parents to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mrs Karin Kelly	Reporting Inspector
Mr Christopher Cann	Headmaster, IAPS school
Mr Dominic Crehan	Headmaster, IAPS school
Mrs Lynn Duncan	Headmistress, IAPS school
Mrs Valerie Goode	Former Headmistress, IAPS school