

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

INSPECTION OF

BEECHWOOD SACRED HEART SCHOOL

by the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Beechwood Sacred Heart School

Full Name of the School	Beechwood Sacred Heart School
DCSF Number	886/6011
Early Years Number	N/A
Registered Charity Number	325104
Address	12 Pembury Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 3QD.
Telephone Number	01892 532747
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Email Address	hm@beechwood.org.uk
Headmaster	Mr Nicholas Beesley
Chairman of Governors	Fr Kevin Taggart
Age Range	3 to 18
Gender	Mixed 3 to 12, Girls 12 to 18
Inspection Dates	2nd to 5th February 2009

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 statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage were not inspected as part of this inspection.

The inspection was not carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate, and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk 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 Beechwood Sacred Heart School was founded in 1915 by the nuns of the Society of the Sacred Heart as a Catholic secondary boarding and day school for girls. It remained a Convent school on the present site until 1973, occupying the Victorian mansion, Beechwood Hall, set in 23 acres on the outskirts of Tunbridge Wells. Although the school was then handed over to lay management under a board of governors, the nuns retained the freehold until 2006 when that also came into the governors' possession as trustees. A co-educational preparatory school was opened during the 1980s. After a period of some decline in the 1990s, numbers have increased in recent years during the present headmaster's nine year tenure, although the number of boarders has reduced since the last inspection in 2003. The school has embarked this academic year on the admission of boys to Year 7 in the previously girls only senior school, with the intention of becoming fully co-educational in 2011.
- 1.2 Total numbers in the school at present are 356 aged from 3 to 18: in the Nursery 14 children, 7 boys and 7 girls; in the prep school (Reception and Years 1 to 6) 177 pupils, 78 boys and 99 girls; in the senior school 165 pupils, 14 boys (in Year 7) and 151 girls. Forty-nine girls board, most as weekly boarders. The main entry points are into the Nursery, Reception, Year 3, Year 7, Year 9 and Year 12. The school has begun the process, which it aims to complete from September 2011, of becoming co-educational throughout the 3 to 18 age range. Most day pupils come from a radius of 10 to 15 miles around Tunbridge Wells and a significant proportion of the boarders are from overseas, most from the Far East and some from Africa, South America or Europe. The school welcomes pupils representing a wide range of abilities, primarily on the basis that they will fit the Beechwood ethos and benefit from what the school has to offer. In addition to government funding for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school offers scholarships or bursaries to a significant proportion of pupils.
- 1.3 Nationally standardised tests of ability taken in Year 7 indicate a wide range of ability across the first three quartiles of the range of national ability, the majority being in the top half of the national range. The school's ability profile is therefore above the national average and, if pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results in national tests at the ages of 7 and 11 and in public examinations in Year 11 and Year 13 will be above the average for all maintained schools.
- 1.4 The school has identified 80 pupils with some degree of learning difficulty or disability (LDD) and provides extra support for 68 of these. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs. In addition, 23 pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) receive extra help and the school has also identified a number of particularly able or talented pupils.
- 1.5 The school's mission is to be a vibrant, caring school, providing an education based on Catholic Christian principles, affordable to parents and attractive to pupils, enabling all who study there to achieve their full potential and equipping them to compete successfully in the outside world. Its aims are to be: a happy, friendly school with a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere; a school in which every pupil is known and valued personally; a school in which pupils can grow and develop with confidence; a school which maintains traditional values, but always seeks to keep up with modern innovations and developments.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The educational experience provided for all pupils in the school is broad and of high quality. Including a wide range of extra-curricular activities, it fully meets the school's aim of providing an education based on Catholic Christian principles which is attractive to the pupils. The curriculum is broad, balanced, coherent and relevant; it promotes pupils' linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human, social, aesthetic and creative development. Since the previous inspection in 2003, curricular progression, from year to year and between different sections of the school, has been thoroughly reviewed and the most able pupils are now being identified and well supported.
- 2.2 In the curriculum, ample opportunities are given to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills to a high level; similarly, numeracy skills are promoted and developed across the school at each stage. In the Nursery all six of the Early Learning Goals are covered appropriately in the weekly planning for the curriculum. In response to comments in the last Ofsted report, more time is given to working in small groups; for example, during time spent with a music specialist the children are split into smaller groups, and more play activities are used to support writing. Religious education (RE) and personal, social and health education (PSHE) feature in all years in the school. French is introduced from Year 3 in the prep school, and Spanish and German are added in Years 8 and 9. For GCSE in Years 10 and 11 this breadth is maintained with a compulsory core of English, English literature, mathematics, science, RE, PSHE and physical education (PE), to which are added four optional subjects from a range that includes the separate sciences, three modern foreign languages (one of which is normally chosen), the humanities (including theatre studies) and three technological subjects. Pupils also choose one subject from a GCSE short course block, including art and information and communications technology (ICT), to broaden their academic programme. Pupils in Year 9 are able to complete unit 1 of the Diploma in Digital Applications.
- 2.3 In the sixth form a wide range of subjects is on offer, including theology, law and psychology in addition to subjects available at GCSE. The move to co-education in the senior school, beginning with the current Year 7, has provided the opportunity for an expansion of the PE programme; football and cricket are now taking on a higher profile that will in time extend the range of sports for all pupils. The introduction of woodwork for Year 7 is the start of an expansion of technological education and the establishment of a new design and technology department. In Year 7, boys and girls are taught in separate classes for some of their subjects, and this will continue as they move up the school as far as GCSE.
- 2.4 The comprehensive PSHE programme, highly valued by pupils, runs throughout the school, covering personal development and a basic knowledge of citizenship. It is taught in form and circle time in the prep school and by tutors in dedicated lessons in the senior school, supported by assemblies and, for the older girls, by outside speakers; a recent example was a talk by a former alcoholic on the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption. The programme is reinforced in other subjects such as RE, drama and geography.
- 2.5 The extra-curricular programme, thanks to the commitment of the staff, is extensive and varied in both sections of the school, ranging from ballet and judo to cookery and car purchase. In a programme that changes each term, sporting, academic, recreational and creative activities, on offer at lunchtime and after school, are designed as a complement to, and extension of, the academic curriculum. Almost all pupils are involved; in Years 7 to 10,

pupils are required to undertake at least two activities per week. Academic support clubs are also provided for the girls in Year 11.

- 2.6 The curricular experience of the pupils is further enhanced by extramural visits, often linked to academic subjects. These include: field trips and day trips in the locality for Reception pupils; an annual visit for Year 6 to Derbyshire; and overseas visits for older pupils, such as a German trip to Köln to visit the Christmas markets. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme provides opportunities for older pupils to undertake voluntary service, and girls in Years 10 and 11 support Year 7 pupils in a mentoring scheme. Sixth-form pupils also have opportunities to work with the younger age groups in the prep school and a Young Enterprise group is able to experience some of the realities of running a business.
- 2.7 The preparation for each successive stage of education is carefully managed. Close links are maintained between Nursery and Reception, and between the top year in the prep school and the first year in the senior school. Regular careers guidance starts in Year 9. Very effective measures, including option workshops prepare pupils for their course choices at GCSE. Later on help is provided in choosing subjects for the sixth form. Sixth-form pupils spoke positively about the guidance given to them and the expertise available to help them through university applications. They appreciate the help they receive, particularly from tutors, in completing their UCAS forms, for example through a personal statement workshop. Year 11 all take an aptitude and interest test which also helps with their course choices and a number of pupils undertake work experience each year.
- 2.8 The curriculum is effectively planned and clearly set out in writing. An academic development plan has been adopted and the heads of department, the curriculum co-ordinator in the prep school and the director of studies manage curriculum development and review.
- 2.9 Excellent provision is made for pupils with particular learning needs. On entrance to the school, pupils are expertly assessed by the learning development department which then offers individual or small group lessons according to need. The team of teachers in the department links widely with classroom teachers. Every pupil with LDD has an individual education plan (IEP) which keeps staff informed of each pupil's programme of support and provide relevant guidance on teaching the pupil in ordinary lessons. General guidance is given to academic departments on a variety of learning and teaching methods. Group support is also provided to help with reading and spelling lower down the school.
- 2.10 Gifted and talented pupils are well provided for; differentiated tasks are used in lessons to provide challenge for the most able pupils. The learning development department compiles a register of these pupils and a system of monitoring and support is developing throughout the school. Pupils requiring EAL teaching are generally in Year 9 and above; they too receive expert teaching, either individually or in small groups, and are entered for the appropriate examinations in Years 11, 12 and 13. The whole provision for learning support is an area of strength in the school, and the work it does is greatly appreciated by pupils and teachers.
- 2.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.12 The standards of attainment across the school are good in relation to pupils' ages and abilities and their learning experience is of high quality. The school succeeds in its aim that each pupil should reach his or her potential. The academic standards noted in the last inspection have been raised further and all pupils acquire the essential skills and attitudes for successful study.
- 2.13 Pupils read and write fluently and intelligently at all levels in the school. In class they listen carefully to others' ideas and make their own contributions cogently and with confidence. In the Nursery the children communicate well with each other and with adults. Pupils in Reception expressed themselves well in an exercise in free writing and those in a Year 13 law lesson discussed the duty of care with insight and clarity.
- 2.14 Pupils in both sections of the school show sound levels of numeracy and are able to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills in subjects such as geography and science. For example Year 12 pupils showed a clear understanding of the graphs they were using to record results in biology. Although effective use of ICT is not yet apparent in all subjects of the curriculum, pupils' ICT skills are at least sound and often strong; good examples of the application of those skills were seen in individual use of a mathematics programme in the prep school, and in accessing the internet for research in history in the senior school.
- 2.15 No significant differences were seen in class or in written work in the relative attainment of boys and girls or in the progress shown by pupils of different abilities. The support given to pupils with LDD, to those with EAL and to the gifted and talented, together with the focus of teachers on the needs of each pupil in their class, ensure that pupils of all abilities make good progress and achieve well.
- 2.16 At all levels in the school, pupils' attainment in national tests and examinations is good in relation to their abilities and at age 6 it is high. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, most pupils in the Reception class achieve all six of the Early Learning Goals and some make a good start on Year 1 level work. Results in national tests taken at the end of Year 2 over the last three years, have been far above the national average for maintained schools. In Year 6, results have been well above the national average for maintained schools in English and mathematics and in line with the average in science. GCSE performance overall for the last three years has been well above the national average for all maintained schools; performance in English has been consistently strong. In the last two years, two pupils have been in the top five nationally for their English literature results. Performance at A level has been above the national average for all maintained schools (a relatively higher comparison than the same measure at GCSE). Numbers in each subject are too small to pick out particular strengths or weaknesses but the proportion of A and B grades awarded has been high, often above two-thirds of the total.
- 2.17 Pupils achieve significant results in a range of creative, sporting and other activities, either as individuals or in groups. Success is celebrated in assemblies and elsewhere. A large number of pupils, in both the prep school and senior school, gain success in speech and drama examinations for the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art and for the Associated Board examinations in music. Pupils recently have been chosen for West End shows and the National Youth Choir. In the national Mathematics Challenge, entered at all three levels, four gold awards were won in 2008. Each year some dozen pupils complete the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme gaining bronze and silver awards. In sport, the school has had repeated success in the Kent county basketball championships and has had an England trialist for netball.

- 2.18 The quality of pupils' learning is high, and is very much helped by the excellent relationships established between staff and pupils. Pupils learn to reason and think for themselves and are encouraged to express their own opinions. Pupils' work is well organised and mostly well presented. They learn to take their own notes from an early age. Pupils in a Year 5 English lesson were able to edit and redraft their writing and in Year 10 art pupils were encouraged to develop their own ideas about two contrasting paintings. They use the internet and the excellent school library for research. Mind maps were used as an effective planning tool in a Year 6 English lesson.
- 2.19 Pupils co-operate well together either in small group work, seen frequently and effectively in the prep school, or in readily helping each other out when a difficulty arises. In the Nursery, children played very well together in a session of guided role play, and in a Year 4 PE lesson pupils learned from observation of each other's progress; in a Year 11 RE lesson pupils used a 'silent' discussion technique to develop their thinking about Christian responsibility for the environment. Sixth-form pupils take on responsibility for running a number of clubs, including the Prue Wilson Society, where they organise outside speakers for a mixed membership of staff, pupils and visitors. Pupils are prepared well to cope confidently in the next stage of their education beyond school. Their attitude to learning is excellent, underpinned by a strong work ethic and an ethos of respect for each other and their teachers. To a very large extent they enjoy their lessons and activities.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.20 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school has continued to build upon the high levels of personal development noted in the last inspection, and is very successful in inculcating the values set out in its aims as is clearly demonstrated by the attitudes and behaviour of its pupils.
- 2.21 Pupils' spiritual development is assured. The school maintains a strong Catholic Christian tradition, but welcomes pupils and staff of all faiths or none. Pupils develop an excellent spiritual awareness and acquire a very strong sense of identity and self-worth through their warm and caring relationships with staff. In the prep school particularly, a sense of awe and wonder is developed through assemblies and, when opportunities occur, in the classroom. A dramatic example was seen where a group of Reception children were drawing a volcano, keeping in time with an appropriate piece of music. The local parish priest celebrates Mass at the school each term. All pupils are welcome, participating to the extent that each individual feels comfortable. Instruction for First Communion is provided from Year 3 in the prep school and pupils are encouraged to celebrate their own faiths when the opportunity arises, for example at Diwali. Opportunities for developing spiritual awareness and religious discussion continue throughout the senior school.
- 2.22 Pupils' moral development is strong for their age and is often deeply felt. Pupils have a clear moral sense and from a young age are able to distinguish between right and wrong. Pupils in the Nursery and Reception classes show an appreciation of moral and social matters, for example by taking turns and sharing equipment. PSHE, RE and science syllabuses allow for debate on moral and ethical issues. An assembly for Years 1 and 2 helped pupils to understand the need for rules in the family, and a group in Year 11 engaged in a sophisticated discussion on the distinction between morals and ethics. Pupils are very clear about where they stand on moral issues and ready to defend their positions with confidence. The expectation of staff that pupils behave well, showing respect and consideration for each other, is echoed by the pupils' attitudes and their support for the Beechwood Code.

- 2.23 Pupils' social development is excellent. Pupils contribute well to community life and take on responsibility at all levels of the school: as class captain on the school council, as a buddy in Year 5, as prefects, house captains or boarding council representatives. An understanding of the significance and importance of public institutions in England is developed through PSHE tuition and enhanced by extra-curricular activities, such as the Year 7 visit to the House of Commons and Year 13 work experience in the House of Lords. Displays throughout the school, including house boards and reference to local charities, underpin the distinctive community spirit of the school.
- 2.24 Pupils' cultural development is strong and broadly based. Pupils from widely varied cultural backgrounds work harmoniously together, and there is plenty of opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate each other's cultures. Chinese New Year was celebrated at different levels in the school, so that some pupils could represent their own heritage and others were given an insight into a different culture. An exchange programme has been arranged within the Sacred Heart Schools Foundation world wide, where pupils from Year 10 have the opportunity to exchange a two-week stay with pupils from Europe and America. Years 5 and 6 pupils have recently held a French Day. Exposure to art, drama and music, within and outside the academic curriculum, enriches pupils' cultural awareness. Drama involves the participation of pupils of all ages at school as well as trips to local theatre productions.
- 2.25 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.26 The overall quality of teaching, as at the last inspection, is good; some teaching is outstanding and during the inspection no unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Teaching supports the school's aim that every pupil should develop confidence in their own ability. Teaching enables all pupils to acquire knowledge and skills and to develop their understanding. Teachers plan well and have good subject knowledge. Marking is carried out regularly and with thoroughness. Assessment now informs teaching, and is more consistently and better used throughout the school than was the case at the last inspection.
- 2.27 Beechwood teachers know their pupils very well indeed. They make good use of the detailed information they have available about the skills and level of prior attainment of their pupils. Teachers continue to assess each pupil's performance through the year groups so that they can target their teaching to suit individual needs. Setting different tasks for pupils of different abilities was used effectively in a Year 11 geography lesson where documents of varying complexity were used by each pupil to analyse the work of non-governmental organisations in a developing country.
- 2.28 Teachers employ a variety of teaching methods in lessons, including group work, independent research and practical investigations. This means that pupils are exposed to teaching methods that encourage their creative, intellectual and physical development. Independent learning and creativity were seen in a Year 9 music lesson when, given some rhythm constraints, pupils were asked to create music based on listening to a part of *Appalachian Spring*. In art, pupils in Years 4 and 5 created their own work inspired by an artist's painting. Pupils enjoy their work and are given the confidence to succeed.
- 2.29 The great majority of lessons are well planned and encourage enjoyment and effective learning. Teaching is paced to suit individual ability groups. In the Nursery, tasks are planned to extend the more able, for example in a phonic activity using a digraph; and in PE in the prep school, pupils of all abilities were challenged during a lesson which maintained a

good pace. In a few lessons, pupils' learning suffered from a lack of pace and less good use of time. However, in the great majority of cases in both the senior school and the prep school, where some lessons are taught by non-specialists, teachers' subject knowledge and their enthusiasm for the subject are excellent.

- 2.30 Teachers are very strongly committed to the successful learning of their pupils. They readily give time outside lessons to help pupils who are struggling, or to satisfy those who want to know more about a particular topic. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and their relationships with staff are excellent. In the Nursery and in the prep school, the nursery, classroom and learning support assistants make a significant contribution to pupils' learning and progress. As a result, pupils are positive and enthusiastic, and politely seek clarification when necessary. They enter into discussion willingly and confidently ask questions.
- 2.31 Teaching in all departments is supported by a sufficient quantity and range of resources. The Nursery is particularly well provided for inside but, as the school is aware, the Early Years Foundation Stage play area is not fully satisfactory. Recently there has been significant investment in ICT, and projectors and interactive white boards are used increasingly in both sections of the school. However, the introduction of technology is further behind in the prep school where teachers need to share ICT facilities, sometimes making it difficult to gain regular access. The school is aware that teachers are not yet sufficiently well trained to make effective use of this technology. Since the last inspection, the school library has been greatly improved. It is now a very well run and dynamically led resources centre for the whole school, offering a warm and welcoming place to study; it is well used and valued by teachers and by pupils of all ages.
- 2.32 Teaching and assessment at Beechwood are based on clear policy statements and procedures. Marking is carried out regularly and, in the majority of departments, it is informative, supportive and encouraging. However, when interviewed, some pupils did not fully understand the meaning of the grades they had been given for their work and would like more information about this from their teachers.
- 2.33 In the prep school and Nursery, assessment is outstanding and results are used well to support teaching and learning. In the senior school good practice was seen, for example in mathematics and English, where assessments are recorded thoroughly, reviewed regularly and used by teachers to inform planning. Assessments at various stages in the school, based on external tests and national comparisons, are all used by form and subject teachers to help set targets. Assessment for pupils with learning difficulties or for whom English is an additional language is particularly thorough. Pupils recognised as gifted or talented are also identified so that they can be challenged effectively. An ICT system for the logging and tracking of pupil assessment data is being developed, to improve recording and also make possible more effective analysis by management at all levels.
- 2.34 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care, support and guidance given to pupils, including boarders, is outstanding. The expectation in the school's mission statement and enshrined in the School Prayer that every pupil is valued, known and loved is central to the high quality of care which continues to be a strength of the school.
- 3.2 Pupils receive excellent support, advice and guidance from a range of staff. In the prep school, arrangements are overseen by the head of prep school. The warm family atmosphere is appreciated by both pupils and parents. Pupils said they were able to take their concerns to any member of staff and were confident that they would be attended to.
- 3.3 In the senior school, the heads of division, heads of house and form tutors share responsibility for the pastoral care and welfare of pupils. The pastoral care received by pupils benefits significantly from the input of these key figures, assisted by the deputy head, the head of learning development and the school nurse. Pastoral matters and arrangements are very effectively overseen by the deputy head. Regular meetings are held with heads of division to review current practice, and case meetings are arranged to monitor individual pupils as necessary and to determine an appropriate course of action. This may take one of several forms, including the pupil watch scheme or the green sheet system which enable a pupil's behaviour and welfare to be monitored and reported; an input from the head of learning development or a requirement for an action plan written by the pupil may also be involved. Pupils readily agreed that there was a member of staff that they could turn to for support. Often this is the form tutor, although some identified the head of division or the school nurse as the person they would approach.
- 3.4 Relationships between pupils and staff and among the pupils themselves are excellent and form the foundation of both the ethos in the school and its quality of care. In class and around the school, respect for each other is evident and pupils respond readily to the challenge to make a contribution as prefects, form captains or as mentors of junior pupils. In responses to their pre-inspection questionnaires, pupils were extremely positive about their experience at Beechwood. In the prep school, particular strengths noted were the help teachers provide and the care shown, as well as the activities pupils could join and the opportunities for responsibility; in the senior school, pupils particularly praised the support they were given with their work and, more generally, the range of activities available to them and the encouragement they are given to work independently.
- 3.5 The school has well tried methods to promote good behaviour. The Beechwood Code describes what is expected of pupils, and the anti-bullying policy is well-known and reviewed annually by the school council. The school is aware of the dangers associated with the rise of cyber-bullying and has recently altered its policies to include this feature as well as including it as a topic in the PSHE programme. The school's rules, and the rewards and sanctions policy, are well understood; pupils expressed confidence that both disciplinary and any bullying issues are promptly and sensitively dealt with. It is in keeping with the school's Catholic Christian foundation that some Year 11 pupils said that teachers were more interested in helping pupils to improve than to punish them for their mistakes.
- 3.6 The school has fully appropriate child protection measures, including policies and response procedures. The deputy head, as child protection officer, has undertaken training with the local authority and has, in turn, carried out training for the staff. Staff, including some non-

teaching staff, are also provided with updated guidance at the start of the school year. The school maintains an accurate admission register and attendance is properly recorded by form tutors; any unexpected absence is followed up promptly, in the first instance by the school office.

- 3.7 The school has worked closely with the local fire authority. Detailed risk assessments have been drawn up and recommendations already acted upon or placed temporarily on the risk register. Regular fire drills are held and reported to the facilities manager. A detailed disaster plan has been drawn up but has not yet been practised.
- 3.8 Matters relating to the health and safety of pupils, staff and visitors are managed thoroughly. Detailed and comprehensive attention is given to arrangements to promote and safeguard pupils' welfare, health and safety. Policies and procedures give clear guidance to staff on how to manage the personal well-being of pupils. Arrangements for pupils' medical needs are good. The school nurse is highly regarded by pupils and the sick bay offers a warm and comfortable environment. Emergency medical cover is available at all times. The school also fulfils its duties under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act and has a current three year plan for dealing with disability and accessibility issues.
- 3.9 Arrangements for meals and opportunities for exercise are good. The atmosphere in the dining room is friendly, relaxed and orderly. Pupils appreciate the move to a more healthy choice of meals – chips have been relegated to Fridays only. The combination of PE and games lessons and sports-related activities provides good opportunities for exercise, although some Year 11 pupils regretted the decline in the number of games lessons as they moved up through the school.
- 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 quality of links with parents and the community is excellent. The school has very effective arrangements for informing, consulting and involving parents and goes to considerable lengths to serve and to be involved in the wider community.
- 3.12 Parents are very satisfied with the education provided for their children. Almost all of the responses submitted to the parental questionnaire were positive about the educational provision and support for their children, including for those with learning difficulties. In interviews parents referred in glowing terms to the positive effects of the educational and pastoral programmes on their children, some of whom had had negative experiences before coming to Beechwood. Parents' comments about the academic aspects included references to: excellent teaching, achievement and attitude to work exceeding expectations, excellent progress, enjoyable, well-structured lessons and pupils motivated to learn; few dissenting views were noted. An almost unanimous positive response was given on pastoral matters. Comments included reference to very caring and perceptive staff, encouragement and a very inclusive school where all pupils are fully involved in school life. The inspectors very largely concurred with parents' views. A very small number of parents had concerns about homework, were not fully satisfied with the progress reports they received or felt that they were not encouraged to be involved in the school. Inspectors found no continuing or sustained difficulties behind these complaints.

- 3.13 Parents have good opportunities to be involved in activities and in the work and progress of their children. Parents feel they are welcome at the school and can readily contact staff to deal with any concerns. The parents' association is active, organising events and setting up a well regarded parent 'class rep' system which provides a formal link with the school for raising general matters of parental interest. Home-school diaries provide regular communication about work and, in addition to formal parents' evenings, the open door policy is seen as attractive by parents, particularly in the prep school. Some parents assist with activities, for example with swimming in the prep school and with costume making for dramatic productions throughout the school.
- 3.14 The provision of information to parents and prospective parents is excellent. Reports are regular and helpful throughout the school. The prospectus provides an attractive introduction to the school and the regularly updated website is designed for both prospective and current parents. New parents and parents of boarders are provided with a useful handbook and put in touch with the relevant parent rep so that contact is established with an 'expert' before a child starts at the school. Parents are notified of all relevant policies. 'Regular weekly newsletters, letters to groups or classes about activities, events and consultations, the availability of up-to-date information on the website, the institution of a system to e-mail or send text messages to parents and useful handbooks for parents about general matters or particular subject areas, all add up to frequent and welcome communication.
- 3.15 Concerns of parents are addressed promptly and efficiently. The class reps have regular meetings with senior management where general concerns are raised. Parents report that most individual concerns are dealt with at an informal level but that problems requiring senior management input are fully addressed, involving all concerned in the process.
- 3.16 The school has growing links with the wider community. Pupils help in local primary schools, and undertake community service with those less advantaged than themselves and people with disabilities. Links with other Sacred Heart schools include sixth-form scholarships for one or two girls each year from a school in Hammersmith and a Year 10 exchange programme with schools around the world. Fund-raising events are held for local charities such as the Pickering cancer drop-in centre. The school provides facilities for the local dyslexia association, the National Association of Gifted Children and other local clubs and organisations.
- 3.17 The school meets all of 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

- 3.18 The quality of boarding provision is good and in the area of pastoral care outstanding. In accordance with the school's aims, the boarders, all girls, are happy, valued and relaxed. The small number of recommendations made in the recent Ofsted boarding inspection report have been adopted; the older boarders are currently preparing a 'rough guide' to boarding at Beechwood for the benefit of new younger boarders.
- 3.19 Relationships between the boarders are both positive and supportive. Excellent relationships also exist between the boarders and the adults who care for them, leading to a happy and supportive environment. Boarders feel able to approach any of the boarding house staff with any problems. When there are issues of a disciplinary nature, which are few in number, they tend to be dealt with through discussion and there is rarely a need to progress them further. Older pupils develop a sense of responsibility through the mentoring of younger boarding

pupils, who greatly appreciate this 'elder sister' support. They are also organised to help the younger boarders in the event of an emergency and are responsible for escorting these pupils into town for shopping. Regular meetings of boarders are held in each of the three age divisions, at which they can collectively discuss matters of concern with their housemistress. A boarding council meets once a term with the headmaster and the head of boarding.

- 3.20 The comprehensive weekend programme of activities is appreciated by boarders of all ages; theatre trips are particularly popular. All members of staff are expected to contribute at least one weekend a year to this programme which varies depending upon the season. A fund has been set up to enable pupils to attend some outings without any supplementary charge. In addition boarders are encouraged to join in the regular school evening activities programme. Younger overseas boarders who are invited to friends' houses to stay are able to return the invitation and act as hosts overnight at school. Boarders also have opportunities to be involved within the community through voluntary service programmes organised by the school, and they also help in the preparation of Chinese New Year and other cultural celebrations.
- 3.21 The boarding accommodation is being refurbished over time and that recently carried out, especially in the bathroom areas, is of a high standard. Despite the limitations of the buildings, rooms are generally spacious, bright and with good storage space. Each room has a wash hand basin and a notice-board on which to place posters and photographs. General areas for boarders' use have televisions and basic catering facilities. Boarders may also use the music practice rooms and other areas and facilities of the school, such as the computer room and the library, in the evenings and at weekends.
- 3.22 The head of boarding and the housemistresses work hard to ensure a comfortable and safe environment. Housemistresses meet regularly with the head of boarding, and the leadership and management of boarding is good. Records of all boarding incidents and risk assessments are kept, and close links are maintained between boarding staff and form tutors to ensure fully integrated support for the girls. Boarding and the boarders have a significant place in the school and contribute particularly to the strong family community ethos.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The structure of governance is clearly defined and within those arrangements the governing body provides effective oversight of the school as it seeks to meet its aims. The governors are committed to the vision of the school's primary intention of focusing on the individual within a Catholic community setting, so as to help all pupils to develop their particular talents and to enhance their personal development.
- 4.2 Since the last inspection, governors have introduced a number of committees to focus on different aspects of the school: in addition to finance, these now include education, governance and development, with marketing to come. In addition, particular governors are linked to boarding, the prep school, child protection or health and safety; and the two foundation governors have a particular concern to maintain the Catholic Christian ethos of the school's original foundation. The increased demands on governors have meant that the present number of governors and range of expertise is too small and the intention is to increase the size of the governing body.
- 4.3 They are aware of their responsibilities and are closely involved in financial planning, and make the necessary investment in human and material resources to achieve this purpose. Their current strategic planning centres on an ambitious and very necessary development of the school site following on from the significant expansion of co-education to the senior school.
- 4.4 The governors, increasingly through the new committees, have a good insight into the school and its needs. They strongly support the headmaster in his running of the school and take close notice of what the school achieves. In particular, they meet their responsibilities in regard to the welfare, health and safety of the pupils.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The school is well managed at every level and led with vision and clear purpose. The school's ethos and aims are very well established and maintained. Planning is thorough, based on increasingly effective monitoring and review. Teachers form a strong and committed team. Non-teaching and administrative staff support the teachers and do much to ensure the welfare of the pupils. Overall management in the school is stronger and more clearly defined than was the case at the last inspection.
- 4.6 Strong and effective leadership and management derive from the leadership team: the headmaster, the deputy head in the senior school and the head of prep school. This is clearly reflected in the quality of the education, the care and welfare of the pupils and the fulfilment of the school's aims. As well as setting policies and procedures, this team are responsible for the smooth daily running of the school, and for monitoring standards and achievement in all aspects of its life. The ethos and direction of the school is clearly set from the top and all staff work hard as a team to maintain these principles in the life of the school. For example, all concerned in the very important introduction of co-education in the senior school are committed to ensuring that the boys benefit from the same distinctive care and educational benefits which already exist for the girls.

- 4.7 At the next level, the heads of division and curriculum co-ordinator in the senior school, director of studies and Key Stage 1 co-ordinator in the prep school, head of Nursery, head of learning development and head of boarding bring experience and skill to the effective management of key pastoral and educational areas of the school. Heads of department, together with their subject co-ordinators in the prep school, are responsible for the quality of teaching and learning, and play a full part in establishing appropriate procedures and in reviewing their effectiveness. Links between the two sections of the school work well. Well-planned arrangements for contact between relevant staff ensure that integration is good, both between the prep and senior schools and between different stages in each.
- 4.8 Planning at all levels is well done, based on a thorough analysis of needs, with input from all staff in all areas, using a recently acquired ICT programme. Priorities are set, for example in the academic development plan and in the governors' development plan, to be implemented, reviewed and adjusted to future eventualities later. Although some ways to share good practice are being tried, in order to raise the standards of teaching and learning still further, peer observation and review are not currently favoured.
- 4.9 Staffing levels are appropriate, and staff are well qualified and carefully checked to ensure their suitability to work in the school. An induction programme exists for all new staff and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) have their own programme which follows the national scheme. A recent NQT had found the process useful and supportive. The appraisal scheme has recently been adjusted to run on a two-year cycle and is generally well received by staff for the recognition it gives to their work and the opportunities it creates for their professional development. The school is now planning to extend appraisal to administrative and other staff. The teaching staff in both sections of the school form a strong, mutually supportive and committed team, readily recognising the management support they in turn receive. The school runs very well on a day-to-day basis, supported by an efficient and experienced administrative and secretarial team, whose contribution is warmly recognised by the pupils and teaching staff, and indeed by many parents.
- 4.10 The control of financial resources makes bursary support available for a large proportion of pupils but also provides appropriate and sufficient resources to support the school's educational aims. The extensive site, including the very fine central building housing the senior school, is well maintained by the facilities manager and her team. The school recognises the need for refurbishment in some areas, such as the Early Years Foundation Stage play area, and for further building development, including the creation of more room in the prep school; the headmaster and the governors are currently working on plans for that purpose.
- 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 The school very successfully meets its aims to be a vibrant, caring community founded on Catholic Christian principles, where all can achieve their full potential, academically, in their personal development and in the realisation of their particular talents. The quality of the education offered is high and includes a particularly wide-ranging activities programme as well as good support for careers and higher education. Good academic standards are achieved throughout the school and many pupils achieve success in sport or the arts. The quality of pupils' learning is high. Pupils' personal development and the pastoral care provided are excellent for boarders and day pupils alike. The learning support for the most able and for those with learning difficulties is first rate both in terms of provision and in its effectiveness. The standard of teaching is good overall, largely due to teachers' detailed knowledge of the pupils, and the excellent relationships between staff and pupils. The Nursery, the prep school and the senior school have established strong relationships with their parents, who are kept very well informed about the school and about their children's progress. The school is well led and managed at all levels and both teachers and support staff function as a strong and purposeful team fully committed to the welfare of the pupils.
- 5.2 The school has maintained the strengths noted at the last inspection and moved forward in other areas. The most significant recent change has been the very positive move to co-education in the senior school with its implications for additions to facilities and a thorough review of the education provided by the school to meet the needs of all members of the expanded school community. The library in the senior school has been greatly improved and is now an excellent resource, used well by the whole school. Assessment is now comprehensive and information is used well to track both individual and more general progress. In other ways, the school seeks constantly to raise standards in teaching and learning but has not yet encouraged peer observation and review to that end. Much has been done to improve the quality of ICT facilities and better use is being made of ICT in the classroom. However, staff have not yet received sufficient training to develop skills and use technology to best advantage. The school buildings and the site generally have benefited from maintenance and refurbishment, including in the areas noted in the last inspection. The governors and senior management are aware of future needs for development.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no significant shortcomings in the education and care it offers its pupils. To ensure its continued development and improvement, it should:
1. plan a continuing programme of training to increase the effective use of ICT by all staff to support teaching and learning across all subjects of the curriculum;
 2. make full use of peer observation and review, across subjects and different levels in the school, to raise standards still further;
 3. as circumstances allow, implement the planned building and facilities development, including improvements to the play area for the youngest children.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 2nd to 5th February 2009. 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 the boarding divisions and the sick bay. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mr Michael Higginbottom	Reporting Inspector
Mr Tony Blackhurst	Headmaster, IAPS school
Mrs Kerry Cooke	Director of Studies, IAPS school
Mr Stephen Crump	Headmaster, GSA school
Mr Roger Denning	Former Deputy Head, HMC school
Mrs Lynn Doughton	Head of Department, GSA school
Mr John Richley	Former Director of Studies, HMC school
Miss Susan Woodward	Headmistress, ISA school