

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### **Plymouth College**

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

Full Name of the School	<b>Plymouth College</b>
DCSF Number	<b>879/6004</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>1105544</b>
Address	<b>Ford Park, Plymouth PL6 4RN.</b>
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Headmaster	<b>Dr Simon Wormleighton</b>
Chair of governors	<b>Sir Robert Hicks</b>
Age Range	<b>11 to 18</b>
Gender	<b>Mixed</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007</b>

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005 and May 2007.

The inspection was not carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate, and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Plymouth College educates boys and girls between the ages of 11 to 18. It offers boarding with overseas pupils counted among its boarders. The fundamental aspiration of the college is to enable pupils to become independent and self-sufficient citizens who will succeed and contribute responsibly as members of a global community.
- 1.2 The aims of the college, as stated in the new prospectus, are: to produce happy, knowledgeable and caring young adults, who gain confidence in learning and who strive to reach their full potential; to provide a diverse and enriching education that promotes self-discipline, motivation and excellence, in addition to consideration for others, with an underpinning belief in the importance of respecting self and one another, appreciating individual differences and encouraging each other. The college is Christian in its foundation, but does not have any religious denominational affiliation.
- 1.3 The college was founded in 1877. It is situated in a residential area in the north of the city of Plymouth. The original buildings were built on a self-contained site and over the years the college has acquired property along the streets to one side of the site. The buildings themselves are a mixture of older-style school buildings, some of them are now listed, and more modern purpose-built specialist accommodation.
- 1.4 The Plymouth College Trust has responsibility for a junior school as well as for the college. The one governing body has responsibility for the two schools with the administration of the junior school under the direction of a committee of the governing body. The college and the junior school operate as two distinct schools. The merger of the college with St Dunstan's Abbey School for girls has taken place since the last inspection. Governors from St Dunstan's Abbey School hold places on the governing body. The staff of St Dunstan's were offered posts either in the junior school or in the college. Since the last inspection additions and improvements to buildings have been carried out.
- 1.5 A total of 565 pupils are taught, 336 boys and 229 girls. A total of 101 pupils board, 55 boys and 46 girls. The sixth form includes 102 boys and 68 girls. Fifteen pupils benefit from Ministry of Defence or Foreign and Commonwealth Office boarding allowances and a significant number of pupils receive some fee support from the college. Pupils are mostly drawn from families with professional, farming and business occupations or backgrounds.
- 1.6 The college does not select entirely on ability. Some pupils entering Year 7 have passed the 11+ and will have been offered grammar school places although a significant number will not have been. Places are offered following interviews and after an assessment that the college can offer an education that is suitable for the needs of the pupils applying. The catchment area for day pupils comprises not only the city of Plymouth but also west and south Devon and east Cornwall. Pupils are drawn from primary schools across three distinct and different Local Education Authorities, as well as from independent junior and preparatory schools including the Plymouth College Junior School. The cultural mix, as well as the academic mix, is diverse. Overseas pupils are mainly from mainland China, Hong Kong and Europe.
- 1.7 Standardised test results show that the ability range of the pupils is indeed broad, ranging from some very able pupils, through those with average levels of ability, to those who have learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD). Overall the average ability of the pupils is above the national average. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results in public examinations will be above the average for all maintained schools.

- 1.8 One pupil has a full statement of special educational need. Ninety-six pupils are identified by the college as having some degree of LDD and participate in the college's support programme. Thirty-seven pupils are from families where English is an additional language (EAL).
- 1.9 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the college. The year group nomenclature used by the college and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following table.

School	NC name
Year 7	Year 7
Year 8	Year 8
Year 9	Year 9
Year 10	Year 10
Year 11	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13

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

### **The Educational Experience Provided**

- 2.1 The college provides a good range of educational opportunities, suited to the interests, aptitudes and needs of each pupil. In so doing, the college successfully achieves its declared aim to provide a diverse and enriching education that promotes self-discipline, motivation and consideration for others. In the last inspection, the curriculum provision was judged to be broad and balanced, and appropriate to the needs of the pupils. This continues to be the case.
- 2.2 All pupils have access to a broad range of educational experiences. Their linguistic, mathematical, scientific and technological abilities are well developed through the teaching of the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). The range of subjects available to pupils in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form curriculum is broad and allows pupils to make guided choices that contribute to the further growth of their technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative development. Pupils are given ample opportunities in lessons and in activities to listen, to voice opinions and to consider the opinions of others.
- 2.3 A key aim of the college is to produce happy, knowledgeable and caring young adults who gain confidence in learning and who strive to reach their full potential. The high quality of relationships between staff and pupils, the range of experiences provided by extra-curricular activities, by music, art, drama and by sport and outdoor activities provide a rich context for pupils to grow in self-confidence, self-discipline and to achieve success. Respect and consideration for others and an appreciation of the differences between people are developed in the activities of the house system, in the day-to-day life of the college, in the outdoor activities and in the detailed preparation for trips abroad.
- 2.4 Pupils have many opportunities through team, as well as individual, activities to develop personal skills and to pursue individual interests. Representation of the house in inter-house competitions, being a member of a college team, or participating in competitions develops a sense of pride, self-discipline and encourages pupils to take responsibility for improving their performance. The wide range of activities in which this is possible enables every pupil to find an activity in which they can achieve success. The skills, knowledge and understanding they acquire in their formal studies are further refined in the many and varied activities offered during the school day as well as after school. Expeditions, trips abroad, residential and outward-bound experiences make significant contributions to enriching their education.
- 2.5 The college prepares pupils well for the next steps in their education. Preparation for examinations and for application to universities and colleges is thorough without detracting from the wider aims of the college. The thoroughness and the range of the careers advice, starting in Year 7, is an example of best practice. A high level of support is available to older pupils in their selection of the next step in their education giving them an excellent bridge to their future.
- 2.6 The curriculum prepares pupils well for adult life. Pupils develop understanding of key social and personal issues in the programme of personal, social, health and moral education (PSHME), covering such topics as sex education, drugs, citizenship, relationships, responsibility, leadership and the appropriate safeguards to take when using the internet. Working with the members of the local community in Plymouth as well as participating in development work overseas, enables pupils to develop a strong sense of responsibility towards others and to acquire a keen awareness of cultural differences and a sensitivity to the practical variations between cultures and religions.

- 2.7 Pupils of all abilities, as well as pupils with EAL, benefit from access to the broad range of subjects and activities and from the support they are given. Thorough and well-structured profile statements of all pupils with learning needs or disabilities identify individuals' learning difficulties. Each of these pupils has an Individual Education Programme (IEP). Well-structured provision is made available and ranges from support in lessons by the learning support staff, teaching them in small groups, one-to-one tuition with the learning support teacher or working with the specialist teachers who attend the college each week. Gifted and talented pupils have been identified and a range of options for their development is available. Subject leaders have responsibility for ensuring that the classroom teachers cater for these needs. The effectiveness of these arrangements is uneven. Pupils with EAL find help in a well-organised and effective programme. The response of teachers to the needs of these pupils in lessons is not always effective. Despite this, the interaction of pupils and the opportunities for language development within the boarding environment allows these pupils to be sufficiently supported in their language development to make good progress and to achieve success in their learning.
- 2.8 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

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

- 2.9 Pupils of all abilities are well educated and achieve good educational standards. Standards in numeracy and literacy are good. Pupils develop to a good level the essential skills and attitudes for work and study. Their ability in critical and creative thinking stands them in good stead and contributes to the successes they enjoy in learning and in moving to the next stage of their education. Results in national tests are well above average. The college fulfils its aim of enabling pupils to gain confidence in learning and to strive to reach their full potential.
- 2.10 Across the ages and across all subjects, pupils are well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding. They are good at critical and creative thinking. Good examples were seen of pupils applying their prior knowledge, understanding and skills to support their learning. Pupils respond well when they are given opportunities to be critical in their thinking and to be creative in finding solutions to problems. In a Year 10 art lesson pupils showed imagination and creativity in the way they used computer software to produce landscapes based on their observations around the school. A group of Year 8 pupils won the Scene of Crime competition in a chemistry festival at Plymouth University when they used their scientific knowledge to solve a forensic science problem.
- 2.11 In lessons and in activities, boys and girls of all ages and abilities reach good levels of attainment and make good progress. Pupils with LDD make good progress and reach standards that are good for their abilities. Pupils with EAL achieve good levels of attainment in examinations and make good progress over time, even though in some lessons the teaching took insufficient account of their needs. More able pupils reach standards that are good for their ability and make good progress over time even though they are not sufficiently challenged in some lessons.
- 2.12 Pupils perform well in public examinations. Results in GCSE are good and over the last three years have been well above the national average for all maintained schools. Results at A-level have been satisfactory for pupils' ability and have been above the national average for all maintained schools. Standardised test scores show that pupils make good progress over time. On leaving the college pupils are successful in gaining entry to a wide range of higher and further education courses, professions and the armed forces.

- 2.13 Pupils also achieve very good success in many other areas. The Swing Band won the Carlton Big Band Cup at a local festival in 2006 and the school is represented on the Devon Youth Orchestra. Pupils have gained county honours in rugby, girls' hockey, cross country running and cricket, with individual success on the England under 15 cricket team. In 2007, teams won the finals of the Devon Schools Sevens and the U12 West Devon rugby competitions. In the past three years swimmers have won World and European medals and broken over 20 British and English records. The number of pupils who have been selected to swim for Great Britain or England is now in double figures. High levels of success are also achieved in the Ten Tors competition, in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, and Combined Cadet Force. Over the past four years pupils have taken first and second places in the IFS Student Investor Competition. The top three places have been awarded in the CIMA Management Competition and a third place was gained in the Young Business Writer of the Year. Pupils have been winners of regional business and young consumers competitions.
- 2.14 The high levels of success recorded across such a wide range of activities demonstrate the commitment of the college to provide its pupils with as many opportunities as possible to reach their full potential. In seizing these opportunities, and in rising to the challenges inherent in them, pupils develop self-discipline, exercise leadership skills, work collaboratively and learn to be independent and self-sufficient.
- 2.15 Pupils develop as articulate and effective communicators. They speak purposefully, listen intelligently and write fluently and imaginatively for a variety of purposes. Pupils showed highly developed powers of argument in lessons. In discussions and interviews, they were good listeners, and were well able to express opinions. In group interviews they listened attentively to each other, picking up and developing points made by other pupils in the group.
- 2.16 Pupils make good use of their mathematical understanding to apply concepts, and to use their knowledge and mathematical skills across a range of subjects. Pupils' work and displays in classrooms showed effective use of mathematical understanding in subjects such as geography and science. In a Year 12 mathematics lesson pupils used their knowledge to work out the minimum time for a pit stop in motor racing using critical path analysis.
- 2.17 Pupils' use of ICT is of a good standard. They are competent in the application of a broad range of software. The in-house teaching resources on the school intranet are well utilized, especially by the sixth form.
- 2.18 Pupils are good at organising their work. Their written work is very well presented. The use of personal sketch books in art is well developed and is a good indicator of the growth of pupils' understanding and skills. The good level of note taking is evident in those subjects where pupils are required to investigate and to collate information. A very good example of this was seen in a Year 11 classical civilisation lesson, dealing with housing in Pompeii. Pupils responded with great enjoyment to the teaching style and built up their own notes as the lesson progressed.
- 2.19 Pupils' enjoyment is a strong feature of many lessons helping to create an atmosphere in which they are confident and willing to participate. They settle quickly to class work and are eager to co-operate with their teachers. They are comfortable working alone, in small groups or in pairs in pursuit of the learning objectives in lessons.

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

- 2.20 The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is outstanding. The college effectively meets its aim of enabling pupils to become independent and self-sufficient citizens who will succeed and contribute responsibly as members of a global community.
- 2.21 Pupils' spiritual development is outstanding and is an area in which the college has improved significantly since the last inspection. They combine confidence and a strong sense of self-worth with compassion and care for others. These are the result of a strong sense of community, supportive relationships and the many activities in the house system. In subjects and activities, pupils learn to listen, to show respect and to be aware of the needs of those around them. Through participation in the outdoor activities programme they develop self-confidence, acquire a sense of responsibility for the welfare and safety of others and develop leadership skills. Pupils gain insights into values and beliefs and into the way in which religious belief affects people's lives through the teaching in religious education, through the PSHME programme and through mixing with fellow pupils from different nationalities and world faiths. The Christian Union gives pupils the opportunity to explore issues of faith and morality.
- 2.22 Pupils' moral awareness is strong. Moral issues are debated in a number of subjects. For instance, in an English lesson Year 12 pupils reviewed the topic of love as described in one of the Canterbury Tales and then broadened the discussion to consider aspects of modern day marriage, dominance in relationships and the equality of women as presented in media stereotypes. The behaviour of older pupils is exemplary. The key contribution they make to the effective running of the house and pastoral systems brings them in daily contact with younger pupils. As a result senior pupils contribute to moral development through their example as role models and through the practical guidance for good behaviour they offer younger pupils. In interview, pupils said they understood the college's code of conduct and felt it was fair.
- 2.23 Pupils' orderly movement around the college and their self-discipline showed how well they understood the need to respect rules and behave in a responsible manner. Inappropriate behaviour is dealt with through a newly-developed code of practice that distinguishes between serious and less serious breaches of school rules.
- 2.24 The generosity of pupils in supporting a broad range of charities reflects their high level of moral awareness. Outreach programmes to the local community, for instance through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, allow practical interactions that make personal demands on pupils. Extensive fund raising supports the practical involvement of pupils in projects in The Gambia, Nepal, Morocco and in other parts of the world where pupils work on building schools and hospitals, working with the local communities.
- 2.25 Pupils' social development is outstanding. At all ages, they respond very well to the many opportunities they have to undertake responsibilities. Being selected as a senior prefect is valued by pupils and is a responsibility the office holders take most seriously. Membership of the newly created school council is seen as an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of pupils in the college. House and tutor groups foster the growth of a community ethos and a sense of belonging that encourages pupils to take seriously the contribution they are expected to make to the welfare of others. The participation of Year 10 pupils in the Sports Leadership Programme takes them into local primary schools where they offer their time and skills in working with young people.

- 2.26 Pupils show an awareness of the wider world in which they live. Citizenship issues are covered well in the PSHME programme and in a range of subjects. In addition, the contact with outside speakers from the police liaison team, the drugs rehabilitation centre and a variety of health professionals gives them a developing awareness of the wider society in which they live.
- 2.27 Pupils acquire a keen appreciation of, and develop respect for, differing cultural traditions. Overseas pupils enrich the cultural and religious diversity within the college. The ways in which pupils from a variety of backgrounds and cultures mingle promote tolerance and foster harmony. The comprehensive programme of educational visits, including trips to the theatre, art galleries and historical sites, builds pupils' appreciation of and respect for their own traditions and cultures. The particular contributions of the music, art and drama departments add richness to the cultural experience of pupils. Lessons across a range of subjects and the opportunities for overseas trips deepen pupils' appreciation of differences between peoples. The education of pupils about local customs and consequences of religious beliefs and practices is a major element in the preparation for working in communities overseas. As a result, not only are pupils able to work more effectively with the people they meet, but are also developing their own awareness and appreciation of the range of cultures and faiths that exist in the world.
- 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 quality of teaching is good. Staff teach their pupils well and are effective in helping pupils to think for themselves and to be critical and creative in their work, so realising the college's aim of helping pupils to gain confidence in learning and to strive to reach their full potential.
- 2.30 The good quality of teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability. Particular care is taken to ensure that pupils with LDD make good progress according to their ability. The detailed IEPs for these pupils guide staff in working with them. The quality of teaching by the learning support staff is of a high quality. Pupils with EAL make good progress in lessons when teachers use the guidance given by the EAL coordinator, check understanding and actively engage pupils in the lesson. The extra support for pupils with LDD and EAL by specialist teachers enables these pupils to achieve good standards and to make good progress overall during their time at the college. Pupils identified as gifted and talented benefit from a good range of activities organised by the college. In some lessons, the high level of challenge provided enables them to make good progress but this is not the case across all lessons.
- 2.31 Departmental discussions, planning and the use of information, allied to good levels of subject knowledge, ensure that teachers plan and organize their lessons well. The variety of materials and equipment and the quality and quantity of resources provided are sufficient and are well used. As a result, teachers have a range of options as to how they present their lessons and involve pupils.
- 2.32 In the best lessons, pupils were challenged to apply prior knowledge and understanding effectively and to be creative and critical in their thinking. Wide-ranging discussions of topics in English lessons, the reviews of performance in drama lessons and the challenge to be original in textiles and in art allow pupils many opportunities to develop critical and creative attitudes to their work. In a games lesson, Year 11 pupils built on their prior knowledge of climbing to progress to the use of rope, harness and abseiling, thus building

skills for the higher tasks they then went on to develop. In a Year 8 biology lesson, well structured activities allowed all pupils to apply what they already knew to take a big step forward in their learning as they attempted to answer the question ‘what is in the design of alveoli that allows a large gas exchange?’ The appropriateness of the carefully selected materials and the variety of activities engaged the pupils from the start so that they developed a good understanding of the topic and made good progress in their learning. In lessons where pupils were challenged to carry out practical activities or to work out solutions to problems, they showed an eagerness to think for themselves. This was evident, for instance, in a Year 10 lesson on fractional distillation where the active involvement of pupils in the demonstration and then in carrying out practical activities greatly assisted their progress and learning. The good-natured interaction with individual pupils, the variety of activities and the smart pace of the best lessons promoted outstanding learning.

- 2.33 Occasionally, lessons concentrated too much on explaining and reinforcing the content, or the teachers provided too few opportunities for pupil participation. While generally teachers’ explanations and instructions to pupils were clear, there were a few occasions when a lack of clarity left some pupils uncertain about the task. Sometimes the task set did not match the abilities of the pupils and the more able pupils were not challenged in a way that would have enabled them to make good progress. In the case of pupils with EAL, there was insufficient checking of understanding and not enough individual support in a few lessons.
- 2.34 Evaluation of performance against national norms is carried out each year on the publication of GCSE and A-level results. Detailed discussions between the director of studies and subject leaders analyses performances in a way that provides the foundation for planning for the future. Standardised tests and measures of progress are used effectively to build an understanding of pupils’ progress and of their needs. This information is readily available throughout the college.
- 2.35 The policy for marking allows for variations between departments. In some subjects, detailed helpful written comments and targets are given. In other subjects, while good oral feedback on performance in lessons and on homework gives pupils the guidance they need to move forward in their learning, there is no record of this feedback. However, pupils confirmed they understand and benefit from the responses of teachers to their work.
- 2.36 Teachers establish a friendly and hard-working atmosphere, in which pupils behave well and take pride in their work. The orderly behaviour of pupils in lessons is a consequence of the good relationships between teachers and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves. It is also a manifestation of the sense of responsibility that pupils are encouraged to acquire as they mature. The use of humour and the calm approach of teachers in many lessons created an atmosphere of enjoyment that fully engaged pupils in their learning. In this atmosphere, teachers can concentrate on using a variety of teaching styles to respond to the learning needs of their pupils rather than having to deal with poor behaviour.
- 2.37 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1]

### **3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

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

- 3.1 The quality of care for pupils is outstanding. The college fully achieves its aims to provide a diverse and enriching education that promotes consideration for others, with an underpinning belief in the importance of respecting self and one another, appreciating individual differences and encouraging each other. The last inspection report commended the college for its effective system of pastoral care, support and guidance. The quality of pastoral care and support continue to be a strength of the college and contribute greatly to creating an environment in which pupils are safe, develop well and are happy.
- 3.2 Staff provide effective support and guidance for all pupils. The houses and the year groups system are the key structures around which the pastoral care of pupils is built. The house system brings together pupils of all ages so that they can participate in a wealth of inter-house activities and younger pupils can be supported by the older ones. The year group arrangements allow for daily supervision and ease of contact with pupils. The heads of year are assisted by form tutors. They in turn are aided by senior pupils, acting as form prefects who work with pupils in the form. As a result, pupils have easy access to a range of individuals who know them well should they need help or guidance. The careers teacher and the LDD and EAL coordinators work in close harmony with the heads of year to provide co-ordinated care and guidance for pupils. In interview, pupils said they had no hesitation in turning to staff for assistance.
- 3.3 Effective pastoral arrangements support staff in the exercise of their responsibilities. The pastoral system is directed effectively by the deputy head, who works closely with heads of year and the heads of house to give tutors the guidance and the support they need to be effective in their work. All required policies for the pastoral care of pupils are in place giving due guidance to staff on how best to serve the needs of their pupils.
- 3.4 The positive relationships between staff and pupils are a key element in creating and sustaining the ethos of the college and in promoting the welfare of pupils. The relaxed and friendly manner in which pupils and staff work together enhances every aspect of the life of the college and promotes the development of pupils.
- 3.5 Pupils are aware of their responsibility for considerate behaviour. This theme is well covered in assemblies, in the PSHME programme and in form time discussions. Pupils are well aware of the anti-bullying stance of the college and play an important role in preventing bullying from taking place. In interviews, pupils said they knew what to do if bullying should occur, but expressed the opinion that it happened only rarely, if at all. Strategies to foster good behaviour and to prevent bullying are based on encouragement and positive reinforcement. Monitoring of internet usage and screening of equipment used by staff and pupils create reasonable safeguards against internet abuse.
- 3.6 The college takes meticulous care to safeguard and promote pupils' well-being. Child protection arrangements are well documented in the staff handbook, expressed in the college policies, known by staff and carefully observed. The named person for child protection is the deputy head. Her training and that of all staff is appropriate. Child protection training and induction of new boarding staff are now formally recorded as recommended by the last Commission for Social Care Inspections (CSCI) report.
- 3.7 Procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety are secure. Risk assessments for all activities are carried out with great attention to detail. Pupils taken ill are treated with due

care and consideration. Suitably qualified first-aiders are readily available throughout the college. The admissions register is well kept. Registration procedures are effective and lateness and absences are dealt with appropriately. High levels of attendance allow pupils to benefit from the many experiences the college provides as part of their education. All necessary measures have been taken to minimise the risks from fire and other hazards and full records of fire drills are kept. The quality and quantity of the food served is very good, with a wide choice available to suit all requirements. Catering staff and teachers supervise the dining area.

- 3.8 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**

- 3.9 The college has an effective partnership with parents and worthwhile links with the wider community which are beneficial to its pupils. The strength and effectiveness of these contacts were recognised in the last inspection. The outstanding quality of these links continues to be a feature of the college, ensuring it meets its declared aim of enabling pupils to become independent and self-sufficient citizens who will succeed and contribute responsibly as members of a global community
- 3.10 The responses to the parents' questionnaire, completed before the inspection, reflected strong parental satisfaction with the education and the support given to their children. A small number of parents raised concerns about lack of opportunity to be involved in school life. A few had reservations about behaviour or about the help available to pupils with LDD. The inspectors found no evidence to support these concerns. The college, for instance, involved several groups of parents in discussions about the changes to the school uniform. The evidence from the inspection points to good behaviour in lessons and around the college. The support given to pupils with LDD is very good.
- 3.11 Parents are encouraged to be involved in all activities such as sports, assemblies, concerts, drama productions and other college events and are welcomed to support the work and progress of their children. The active parents association works diligently to bring parents and staff together. Parents are invited to speak on issues of importance, and to share their expertise on a range of topics in the PSHME programme. Many parents assist the older pupils by giving time to help them with interview practice. These occasions and easy access to senior staff afford parents further opportunities to meet staff and discuss issues.
- 3.12 The recently-revamped pupil planners allow parents to keep up-to-date with their children's work and are a regular point of contact between parents and classroom teachers. Use of this planner, along with contacts between the college and parents if there is any cause for concern about a pupil, allows for early intervention to resolve problems. A twice-termly newsletter, a comprehensive termly calendar, and a regularly updated website are greatly appreciated by parents and keep them informed about college news and activities. Access to the college intranet is proving to be an increasingly popular means for parents to keep in touch.
- 3.13 Parents receive frequent information about the academic performance of their children through a carefully timetabled programme of grades reports, full reports and parents' evenings. Parents' evenings are arranged to follow the issue of reports so that parents can discuss points raised.
- 3.14 The college handles the concerns of parents with due care. The college now publishes its formal complaints procedure annually and tells parents of the number of complaints raised in the preceding academic year.

- 3.15 The college promotes extensive links with the wider community. This is one of the strengths of the college. College facilities are regularly used by local clubs and associations, bringing pupils into contact with sports and activity leaders and participants from the local community. Year 10 pupils develop leadership skills through their work with primary school pupils on the Sports Leaders Programme and through the annual sports festival they organise for children on the programme. The strong links with Plymouth University allow for expansion of skills in music and modern foreign languages. The Young Enterprise scheme gives many opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of business and management through contact with the local business community. Community service is an active part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, taking participants out into the city of Plymouth to serve the needs of others in the community. Trekking and camping on the continent and in North Africa as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme brings pupils into contact with an international community. The activities of the college pupils over the years, such as building hospitals, schools and accommodation in Nepal, in The Gambia and in Morocco, open up vistas on the international world which make a valuable contribution to pupils' education. Through the house system, pupils organise a large number of creative events which are fun, involve the whole college and raise considerable sums of money for local, national and international charities.
- 3.16 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

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

- 3.17 The quality of the boarding experience is good and supports pupils' education making a significant contribution to the college's aim to educate the whole person.
- 3.18 Relationships within boarding are very positive and good support is given to all pupils. The boarding staff work diligently to create a family experience that reflects the general ethos of the college. Pupils said they feel secure in this atmosphere and in interview said they appreciated the care and support available to them. Reorganisation of the boarding arrangements has provided a clear management structure and clear and helpful job descriptions have been developed. Inconsistencies in policies and procedures noted in the last inspection have been addressed through this reorganisation. The frequent and regular visits of the governor with responsibility for boarding are appreciated by the pupils and staff. Her presence at meals and in the pupils' leisure time gives them ample opportunities to raise issues or to share concerns. Pupils from overseas are made welcome in the boarding system with special attention paid to helping them to settle in and make friends. The sharing of cultural practices and the acknowledgment of differences between peoples of different backgrounds has helped develop good relationships between pupils regardless of nationality or culture. All pupils appreciated the ease of access to staff in the boarding houses.
- 3.19 A good range of activities is provided for boarders during the week and at weekends. Many boarders participate fully in the college's extra-curricular and outdoor activities programmes. Sunday activities with many trips off campus are particularly popular with them. The swimmers, housed in Captain's House where their particular requirements are met, are inevitably limited in the range of activities in which they can participate because of their training regimes. Sunday activities are welcomed especially by pupils in this group.
- 3.20 The quality of accommodation and resources at Captain's House are good and are satisfactory in the main boarding house. Pupils have access to a number of kitchens, games rooms and computers. Each house has a variety of rooms where boarders can relax on their own or with friends. Boys and girls have both separate and shared leisure facilities. The planned refurbishment and redecoration of the main boarding house has started with a

consultation process in which pupils will be involved. This refurbishment is both timely and appropriate because, while the accommodation is adequate and spacious, it is dated and in need of redesign.

- 3.21 The CSCI report of January 2007 included a number of recommendations to which the college has responded with an action plan that is currently being implemented. Much has been done, for instance, to record induction training and staff recruitment procedures formally; child protection training has been followed by all staff; risk assessment now covers all outdoor areas, as recommended; a good start has been made in creating a 'buddy system' for new boarders. The remaining recommendations, including refurbishment of the accommodation, are currently being implemented. There is regular contact between the head of boarding and senior staff, but meetings are not held on a timetabled basis.

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

### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 The quality of governance is satisfactory with some good elements. The board of governors has set appropriate aims and values, and provides direction for the college. The breadth of expertise among the governors makes them a valuable resource from which the college draws considerable benefit.
- 4.2 The structure and management arrangements relating to the governors are now clearly defined. Governors have a clear understanding of their role in the management of the college, and allow the headmaster to exercise his responsibilities appropriately and effectively. Regular meetings between the headmaster and the board of governors give the governors the information they need to be conversant with the needs and opportunities facing the college. A development plan prioritises the key elements for future growth. The planned formation of a strategy group will do much to refine future developments. Monitoring the implementation of this plan is carried out by the headmaster and the bursar. Governors are developing their first-hand knowledge of the college. The governor with responsibility for boarding is a regular and frequent visitor to the boarding houses and has a good understanding of the quality of boarding. A governor with responsibility for staff liaison is well known to the staff through his regular contact with them.
- 4.3 The merger of the college with St Dunstan's Abbey School for girls since the last inspection was carried out effectively. Governors from St Dunstan's Abbey School hold places on the governing body. The governing body is aware of its legal obligations. Governors are involved appropriately in financial and educational development. Individual governors have recently been assigned responsibilities in key areas such as health and safety and child protection. They have not yet set up rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating current provision. Governors have played their part in the preparation and review of all policies.

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

- 4.4 The quality of leadership and management is good. Senior managers and others with delegated duties are effective in carrying out their responsibilities.
- 4.5 Good educational direction and leadership are provided by those with management responsibilities shaped by the clear vision the headmaster has for the development of the college. The senior management team is well informed on all aspects of the life of the college. The management of pupils with LDD is of high quality. Pastoral and boarding leadership and management make a good contribution to the effectiveness of the college in achieving its aims. The future direction and development of the college, as expressed in the college development plan, are based on a clear understanding of the college's key strengths and identified areas for development. Staff are actively engaged in reviews and analyses of performance and are active participants in the decision-making process of the college.
- 4.6 Sound and prudent financial advice and control, led by the bursar, underpin the development process. Much informal monitoring takes place, and careful analysis of pupil performance, scrutiny of tests and formal assessments results give the monitoring the substance it needs to be effective. Senior staff monitor and lead reviews of the effectiveness of all policies and procedures.

- 4.7 Management at all levels is effective in securing, supporting, developing and motivating high-quality staff. The college has an effective system for checking the suitability of staff, supply staff and governors. The appointment of the new staff to Captain's House, where the swimmers board, was based on their expertise as swimming coaches and not on their experience as boarding staff. Induction and training of these staff is well managed by the head of boarding with plans in place for extensive training in all aspects of boarding. There is an appropriate programme for the induction of newly qualified teachers that is comprehensive in its range and positive in the guidance it offers to new teachers. Professional development is linked with performance review. Lesson observation, mentoring and rigorous appraisal are proving to be effective tools for professional development. In their manner of working and in the way they relate to pupils, staff exemplify the qualities that underpin the aims of the college.
- 4.8 Financial management is effective in securing appropriate educational resources. The rolling programme of refurbishment is providing pupils with an attractive and stimulating environment. Teaching resources are sufficient for effective teaching. The well-stocked library is a valuable asset for private research and study as well as providing a quiet haven for personal reading.
- 4.9 The administration of the college is effective and efficient. The administrative, catering and maintenance staff contribute to achieving the aims of the college by the range and quality of support they offer. The role of the porters in maintaining a high level of security contributes greatly to the safety and well being of pupils and staff. The good humour of these staff and the high quality of relationships between them and other staff and pupils make an important contribution to the community atmosphere of the college.
- 4.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.11 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 college is successful in its aim of enabling pupils to become independent and self-sufficient citizens, able to contribute responsibly as members of a global community. It meets the needs of pupils with a wide range of abilities and interests, and from a variety of backgrounds. Pupils make good progress in all aspects of their learning and development and achieve good levels of attainment in public examinations and in a wide range of activities. The quality of personal development and care for others is outstanding. Key factors in the success of the college are the range and the high quality of the activities and support programmes and the strong commitment of staff to supporting pupils. Attention to the needs of more able pupils and to those with EAL is inconsistent across lessons. Pupils themselves make a positive contribution to creating a sense of community within which all are made to feel at home and within which they can develop effectively. A strong partnership with parents, worthwhile links with the wider community, including a challenging international dimension, enrich the provision for pupils' education. The good leadership and management throughout the college, give clear direction and support in creating an educational experience of benefit to all pupils. Governors, in partnership with the leadership of the college, have established a clear strategic view to take the college forward.
- 5.2 Most of the issues raised at the last inspection have been successfully addressed. More able pupils have been identified and a start made on attending to their needs. Management of subject areas has been improved. There has been a significant improvement in the personal development of pupils through the high quality activities programme and through the outstanding level of pastoral support given. The educational environment has been improved through considerable expenditure on refurbishment as a part of an on-going plan. The policy directing the use of ICT across the college has been successfully set in place.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

## Next Steps

- 5.4 The college has very few issues to resolve but in order to improve its provision further it should address the following matters.
1. Give more consistent support to the more able and to pupils with EAL by:
    - learning from the good practice that already exists in supporting these pupils in some lessons;
    - ensuring all teachers follow the guidance given by the EAL coordinator;
    - continuing to explore ways of setting stretching work and challenging problems that match the ability of the more able.
  2. Governors should develop a clearer insight into the workings of the school and acquire a greater first-hand knowledge of the quality of education by:
    - establishing a rigorous monitoring programme in which they are actively involved;
    - creating greater opportunities for making contact with a wide range of staff.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

## 6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the sanatorium. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.
- 6.2 A bursar from another school made a preliminary visit as part of the Independent Schools' Bursars' Association (ISBA) scheme, spending the day with the bursar's department. The principal findings have been included in the relevant sections of this report.

### List of Inspectors

Mr Edward Dunphy	Reporting Inspector.
Mr Michael Broderick	Assistant Head, GSA school.
Mr Stephen Tint	Head of Department, HMC school.
Mr Roger Woodburn	Head of Science, HMC school.
Mrs Caroline Tibble	Deputy Head, HMC school.
Mr Rick James	Head of Department and Head of Sixth Form, HMC school
Mr Julian Thould	Headmaster, HMC school.