

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
INSPECTION REPORT ON
Altrincham Preparatory School

Full Name of the School	Altrincham Preparatory School
DfES Number	358/6002
Address	Marlborough Road, Bowdon, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 2RR
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Headmaster	Mr A Potts
Proprietor	Altrincham Preparatory School Limited
Age Range	3 - 11
Gender	Male
Inspection dates	6th – 9th February 2006

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 has 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.

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.

1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Founded in 1936, Altrincham Preparatory School (APS) is a limited company run by six governor/directors who are the major shareholders. The headmaster was appointed just over five years ago and he is a member of the Independent Schools' Association (ISA).
- 1.2 The school occupies two sites in a residential suburb of Altrincham. The main school site occupies purpose-built accommodation and playing fields completed in 1997, and houses the junior school, from Years 3 to 6, and the Nursery. The original school site, a converted detached house some 800 meters away, provides accommodation for the infants, namely, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.

- 1.3 At the time of the inspection, the school had 301 boys between the ages of 3 and 11 on roll, including 16 in the nursery. Each year group has two classes with an average class size of 22. Almost all pupils remain at the school until age 11, and most proceed to one of the senior independent or maintained grammar schools in the area.
- 1.4 Entry to the school is not selective but the attainment and progress of all pupils is systematically reviewed to ensure that each is coping with the academic pace and rigour that the school wishes to sustain. Twenty pupils have been identified by the school as requiring special education provision, one of whom has a statement of special educational needs. The school has a mix of different cultures from a number of ethnic groups but the majority are of white British origin. Standardised tests show that pupils' average ability is above the national average. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results will be well above the average for all maintained primary schools.
- 1.5 The school aims, "to realise the potential of each boy", by providing, "a secure, happy environment and work within a disciplined framework which encourages each pupil to respond to the best of his abilities." It also aims "to develop self-confidence in the boys, as well as providing an excellent academic education." The prospectus states, "Our main benchmark is the entrance examinations to Manchester Grammar School and the area's leading schools."
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout the report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The educational experience provided is good and builds on the strengths of the last inspection. Planning for literacy is now more methodical, pupils have dedicated time for information and communication technology (ICT), and the addition of design technology provides the pupils with an opportunity for designing and making in different materials. The school has yet to address fully the recommendation made in the last inspection to plan for the needs of the most able pupils in all lessons. The declared priority of the school is to provide an academic education, leading to admission to selective grammar schools, state and independent, in the Greater Manchester area. Staff, governors, parents and pupils all willingly subscribe to and strongly support this aim. The educational experience provided is entirely consistent with the school's declared aims and philosophy.
- 2.2 The school provides a broad and reasonably balanced education which contributes well to the pupils' linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development. It also contributes well to the pupils' acquisition of speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills.
- 2.3 The largest proportion of curricular time is given to literacy and numeracy, and standards in both areas are high throughout the school. Science and physical education (PE) both receive reasonable allocations of time ensuring that pupils' scientific and physical development is well catered for. The PE programme is weighted towards games in the juniors, and subjects like gymnastics are confined to after-school clubs for this age group. The time available for art, technology and the humanities is just about adequate to deliver the programmes of study, but careful planning and good use of time by the teachers ensure that the pupils' development in these subject areas is not neglected. Cross-curricular work in art and history enriches both subjects and enables, for example, Year 4 pupils to explore and present themes from Victorian life and times.

- 2.4 An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities in music and physical education and games, extends and enhances pupils' creative and physical development, and large numbers of pupils of all ages and abilities participate. All junior pupils receive off-site swimming lessons.
- 2.5 The needs of pupils with special gifts in music or sport are well catered for and these pupils achieve the highest standards of performance in their chosen activity by means of very good coaching and tuition. Other after school activities include clubs for robotics, German and drama, and these are well and enthusiastically supported. Some pupils expressed a wish for a science and a computer club which are not currently available. The school uses off-site community facilities for swimming, golf and cricket, and participates in a wide range of local and regional musical and sporting events involving other schools from the independent and state sectors. Pupils raise generous funds for charities, in one case in close cooperation with a local church.
- 2.6 The pupils are well prepared for the entrance examinations for the various state and independent selective schools in the area, and for the 11+ examination extant in Trafford LEA. In this endeavour the school is highly successful and most of the Year 6 leavers gain entry to the schools of their choice. Pupils acknowledge the support and guidance provided by their teachers in preparing them, not only for the examination, but also for the wider aspects of transferring to secondary schools. The school has strong links with the secondary schools in the area, private and maintained, selective and non-selective. A teacher liaison programme in French with an independent school and a maintained grammar school, enhances the existing good relationships between the schools to the advantage of pupils transferring. Not all pupils proceed to selective schools, however, and the school works hard to support the transfer of all its pupils. For example, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) visits local comprehensive schools to help establish a suitable educational programme for transfer and induction on behalf of Year 6 leavers.
- 2.7 Curriculum planning has improved since the last inspection report, which found that subject schemes were inconsistent in providing sufficient detail and guidance for teachers' planning. The curriculum is broadly based on national guidelines, the Early Learning Goals in the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum elsewhere, with the needs of the senior school entrance examinations strongly influencing curricular planning in Years 5 and 6. Teachers manage these various demands well while promoting equality of access and opportunity for all pupils. Teachers produce long, medium and short-term plans with space for evaluation at the end of each day. These evaluations are sometimes lacking in detail, and are not always used effectively in modifying or improving future plans. Planning in the Reception and infants' classes is outstanding in meeting the needs of individual pupils of all abilities, including the very able, which was not the case at the time of the last inspection. It is satisfactory in the Nursery but planning here does not deal in sufficient detail with learning objectives. Smooth planning across the Foundation Stage is restricted by the separation of the Nursery and Reception classes on different sites. Planning is good in most lessons from Year 3 to 6, and in many instances teachers provide extension work for very able pupils in class and for homework; but such differentiation for the needs of the most able pupils is not always consistent within or between subjects. The school is aware of this and a coordinator has been recently appointed to review and develop provision for gifted and talented pupils; it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this appointment, however.
- 2.8 A SENCO on each site provides very well for pupils with special needs. This provision is well structured on the needs of the individual pupils assessed through careful screening and continuous assessment by the two SENCOs, both in lessons and in withdrawal classes. They plan cooperatively to ensure smooth transition between the infant and junior sections of the school, and prepare individual learning plans (IEPs), which identify the pupils' needs as well as the actions required by class

teachers to address them. Regular monitoring of these pupils' progress, and consultation with class teachers, ensures their access to the curriculum and good progress. Provision for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL), has not until now been regarded as a major issue by the school, although arrangements recently put in place, including the appointment of a specialist coordinator, provide a platform for potentially rapid progress in this provision.

- 2.9 The educational experience provided is good overall, therefore, and prepares pupils very well for the next stage in their education.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.11 The broad curriculum, good planning and teaching expertise, ensure that pupils are very well grounded in knowledge, skill and understanding in the subjects and activities provided, and can apply these and act and think creatively. Scrutiny of written work shows that standards of literacy are high across all subjects and for all ages and abilities. High standards of writing are evident in all subject areas in Reception and infants, and in most subjects in the juniors. In some humanities subjects standards of writing were satisfactory. At the end of the transitional stages, namely, Reception, Year 2 and Year 6, achievement in English is very high. By the end of Reception, the pupils have met their Early Learning Goals and many are tackling more advanced work. At the end of Year 2, pupils understand grammatical structures usually tackled by pupils at a later stage. Special educational needs (SEN) pupils across the school achieve well and make good progress. In Year 6, pupils have a good grasp of ICT applications, although opportunities to apply them across the curriculum are limited. Pupils' investigational skills in science are very good, but less so in mathematics until Years 5 and 6. Standards in art are very good across the entire school. The school achieves its aim in promoting high standards across a broad range of academic subjects. It has improved on the standards of learning and achievement reported in the last inspection in relation to standards observed in lessons and written work. At the time of the last inspection, however, the school did not enter pupils for any national or standardised tests.
- 2.12 No significant differences in relative attainment occur between different groups of pupils. Pupils' achievements in some humanities lessons from Year 3 to 6 is not as high relatively as that in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, possibly because of the lower proportion of time for humanities in the school curriculum. Very able pupils have opportunities to undertake work outside the curriculum in literacy and numeracy in early morning clubs.
- 2.13 Pupils achieve high standards in national tests, standardised measures of attainment, and in the 11+ examinations, and have done so consistently over time. They meet the Early Learning Goals at the end of Reception. Pupils' attainment in national tests at age 7 is good in relation to their abilities. Results in national tests at age 7 over the three years from 2001 to 2004, have been well above the national average for all maintained primary schools. They were far above the national average in mathematics, well above in reading, and above in writing. Inspection evidence from the scrutiny of pupils' work, however, shows that standards of writing throughout the school and especially at the end of Year 2 are high. Externally marked and moderated standardised tests, and Key Stage 2 Optional Tests, show that the school adds value year on year and maintains standards throughout Years 3 to 6. The pupils are very successful in the 11+, and in the entrance examinations for places in selective state and independent schools in Greater Manchester.
- 2.14 Pupils achieve well in sporting activities and music. In the week before the inspection, the school cross country team fared well in the Northern School Championships, with one pupil achieving overall third place. Several teams

performed well in local rugby and football tournaments this term, with the senior teams winning their sections outright. The school also won the recent ISA North swimming gala. The school's high reputation in local and regional musical events and festivals is underpinned by successful individual instrumental tuition, and a high success rate in several instruments in the various music academy exams. The school enters pupils for the LAMDA examinations where the success rate is also very good.

- 2.15 Pupils successfully develop the essential skills for study and they display very positive attitudes to work and to the school generally. Pupils at all stages are articulate and confident speakers, listen attentively to their teachers and each other, read intelligently, and write fluently. Their mathematical skills are generally well developed: mental arithmetic is very good but in the juniors, their problem solving abilities are better developed in Years 5 and 6. Pupils' skills in the use of ICT are satisfactory and have improved since the last inspection: pupils demonstrate good skills in dedicated ICT lessons but opportunities to apply information technology across the curriculum are very limited. Their development in the use and application of design and control technology is satisfactory given the limited time available.
- 2.16 Pupils of all ages and abilities are encouraged to ask questions and discuss ideas in class. Teachers are patient in allowing the pupils to formulate ideas and, by well-directed questions, help the pupils to explore their ideas and shape their responses accurately. Thus, pupils reason and argue cogently and think for themselves. Reception class children could talk articulately about their mathematics and showed a good grasp of the concepts. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 could talk critically about their work in numeracy and could explain their reasoning and methodology. Older pupils in a personal, social and health education (PSHE) lesson on drugs, were knowledgeable and articulate in discussing the effects of drugs on society. In interviews with the inspectors, older boys could discuss the school aims and their expectations of the school; they were aware of the different secondary school options available to them, and they expressed their choices intelligently and intelligibly. Minutes of school council meetings indicated their insight and suitable participation in broader school issues.
- 2.17 Pupils study and work effectively both on their own and cooperatively with others. Scrutiny of written work showed a very good standard of attainment and presentation in homework. Library provision for pupils in Years 1 and 2 is good and it is satisfactory for Years 3 to 6, but because access to computers is limited, there was little evidence of their use by pupils in research. Pupils work animatedly in pairs in French lessons and provide mutual support in the development of their oral fluency. In games, both in and out of school, their teamwork is outstanding, for example, in a lunchtime Year 4 rugby practice. Nursery children play cooperatively in construction work and all pupils share ideas openly in their investigational work in science throughout the school. Pupils settle down quickly and commence work promptly and diligently and in most cases complete the set work in time. On the few occasions when they did not, it was due to a lack of pace in the lesson, or the learning objectives being unclear.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.18 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness of pupils of all ages and abilities is outstanding and is a strength of the school. It makes a significant contribution to the school aim of developing pupils' self-confidence. The quality and range of provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils has improved since the last inspection.
- 2.19 The pupils' spiritual awareness is developed mainly through assemblies, and religious education (RE) and PSHE lessons. The assembly programme and individual assemblies on both sites are carefully planned to engage the boys in worship,

reflection and celebration, in a lively, enjoyable and stimulating fashion. Assemblies are greatly enhanced by lively singing and music; the latter often led by the various school ensembles. The pupils reflect together in assemblies on the correct way to behave in different circumstances, and they pray and sing together with thought and feeling. This contributes to: their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence; their knowledge of different faiths; and their ability to reflect on their own personal beliefs. Assemblies are regarded by staff and pupils alike, as a central and important part of the school day; and the activities, prayers, hymns and readings are carefully chosen to celebrate and develop understanding not only of Christian belief, but also that of other world faiths and cultures. This understanding is further enhanced by the RE and PSHE programmes as well as by visits to the school by ministers from other faiths.

- 2.20 Pupils are praised liberally for their achievements and rewarded with merit marks and house points, contributing to the development of self-esteem and pride in their work and activities. The inclusion of all boys in sporting and musical activities, and the ability to perform at their own level with success, helps to develop the boys' sense of achievement and self-confidence. Academic, sporting and musical achievements are celebrated in assemblies, and the boys rejoice in each other's successes and achievements.
- 2.21 The development of pupils' moral awareness takes place within a caring family community, where the staff provide good role models and have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Staff-to-pupil and pupil-to-pupil relationships are very good and are based on mutual respect. Pupils' moral awareness is excellent, and they are quick to distinguish right from wrong: they know, understand and respect the school rules and regard them as being fair. A clear system of rewards and sanctions reinforces the school code, the former celebrating and reinforcing achievement and good behaviour. Pupils realise that they have a moral responsibility to one another. On the rare occasions when sanctions are employed, they are seen as just and deserved. The school council gives pupils the opportunity to discuss and influence school issues and contribute to the review and development of the juniors' Code of Conduct.
- 2.22 "Golden Rules" and the Code of Conduct are posted around the school as reminders to all. Pupils know these well, regard them as fair and make every effort to follow them. Pupils are aware of any bad behaviour in others and state that they become irritated by it, as it disturbs lessons. Behaviour was overwhelmingly impeccable both in class, around the school and on the games field. Pupils understand that they have a choice in their behaviour towards others and they generally choose to be considerate and thoughtful.
- 2.23 Pupils develop very well socially; they accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute to community life, including knowledge of public institutions and services in England. In Year 6, pupils have had visits from magistrates and councillors and have had opportunities to discuss their work in the community. Pupils have play-acted the roles in workshops, thus deepening their insight into civic institutions.
- 2.24 Year 6 pupils are very aware of, and freely discuss, social issues such as drug taking and abuse, and they are encouraged to form their own opinions about this through guided and structured discussion. They are encouraged to reflect and to question inappropriate behaviour and actions in others outside the school, for example, from topical stories in the media. They are regularly involved in a number of charity events and parents become involved in helping with this too. Pupils in Year 6 discuss the problems of moving on to secondary education and report that this has been invaluable in helping with their transition.
- 2.25 Pupils' cultural awareness is very well developed, and they acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and

harmony between different cultural traditions. In RE lessons, boys learn about the ways and beliefs of different faiths and cultures. Pupils' workbooks show that they know and understand the broad elements of different faiths. They have a good knowledge of the variety of religions and are aware of the faiths of those in their class. Pupils show knowledge and respect of one another's cultures and religions and they work in harmony together. Boys from the Chinese community were encouraged and welcomed to share their experiences regarding Chinese New Year with their classmates, and Muslim children likewise explain their cultural traditions in class. Parents from different cultures visit to talk to the pupils about their own religion first hand, and Nursery children were proud to point out photographs of their parents in school doing this.

- 2.26 Cross-curricular cultural themes provide integrated work in art, history, geography and music and are displayed in an attractive manner conspicuously around the school. Music plays a very important part in generating appreciation of different cultures. The boys from the percussion club presented a lively performance in African singing, drumming and dance at assembly in a joyful celebration of African music, rhythms and dance, in which all junior pupils participated energetically. Masks produced in art lessons served to extend and enhance the Africa theme. In yet another assembly, Chinese music was tastefully presented by a large ensemble playing tuned percussion instruments, to celebrate the Chinese New Year. Neither are British and classical European culture neglected, the latter diffused subliminally through the recital of Mozart's clarinet concerto as a background to the junior assemblies during the week. Colourful artefacts from different cultures and religions, mostly made by the pupils in art and design technology lessons, adorn corridor and stairwell walls in both sites. Many of these are used in class when learning about different cultures, for example, a current Year 1 class display on Judaism.
- 2.27 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.28 The quality of teaching is good in the majority of lessons, and broadly repeats the findings of the last report. In a few lessons the teaching was outstanding, and in a small number it was unsatisfactory. Teachers' planning has improved since the last inspection in that many teachers now plan for the needs of all pupils, especially the most academically able, although such planning is not consistent throughout the school.
- 2.29 The teaching is generally well planned to meet the needs of all ages and abilities, enabling them to acquire new knowledge, make progress according to their ability, and increase their knowledge and skills. In the better lessons, additional work was planned to challenge very able pupils, but this was not done consistently throughout the school. Outstanding lesson planning and teaching in Year 5 literacy and in Reception enabled high standards and rapid progress to be achieved. Activities are usually well chosen to realise the objectives of the lesson and time is managed effectively. In a Year 3 art lesson, efficient and effective use of time and resources and careful choice of activities enabled the pupils to think creatively, produce a clay artefact of good quality, develop skills of working with clay and complete the lesson objectives, thus leaving with a sense of achievement and enjoyment. Games lessons are carefully timed to exact the maximum amount of effort and achievement from the time allowed. Pupils with SEN are withdrawn from lessons for literacy, and follow carefully structured programmes which enable all to make rapid progress. Consequently, pupils of all abilities increase their understanding and skills, and do so in an environment which they find challenging, stimulating and enjoyable. There are few lessons where the happy buzz of well-motivated and enthusiastic youngsters is absent. The volume and quality of work in their workbooks is considerable. In some

lessons plans, however, the learning objectives were not clear so that the learning outcomes were not fully achieved. In a small number of unsatisfactory lessons, long-winded and boring introductions, or dull and undemanding tasks, or both, resulted in the pupils losing interest and not trying their best.

- 2.30 The school has only recently decided to review its provision for pupils with EAL and has appointed a specialist teacher to lead a review of provision, although these pupils do not perform poorly in the various standardised tests. Nonetheless, there was some inspection evidence to suggest that some EAL pupils do not fully grasp the more subtle elements of colloquial English. The school has also appointed a “Gifted and Talented” coordinator to review and develop provision for gifted and talented pupils. Provision for each of these groups is at an embryonic stage of development, however, and there is insufficient evidence to evaluate the impact of these initiatives.
- 2.31 The teaching staff are a healthy mix of youth and age, male and female. Many have experience of other phases of education and their understanding of the links between the different stages enables the school to plan the curriculum as an integrated continuum. Thus pupils are well supported in their transition between the different phases from early years to secondary. Class teachers and subject specialists are well qualified and have a very good working knowledge of the range of subjects they teach. They also understand the demands of the various National Curriculum programmes of study, and of the tests and entrance examinations for which the pupils are prepared at age eleven. Teachers know and understand their pupils well and, for the most part, take pupils’ aptitudes into account when planning and delivering lessons. Year 5 pupils receive coaching in non-verbal reasoning tests to prepare them for the 11+ and respond with enthusiasm, interest and appreciation.
- 2.32 The school is well resourced with books and equipment and has recently installed an interactive whiteboard on each site. Library provision is entirely adequate and there are sufficient computers to resource dedicated ICT lessons. ICT applications beyond this however are underdeveloped. The Early Years sections on each site are well resourced with a range of indoor and outdoor play equipment, which contributes significantly to the children’s development and is used with great gusto and enjoyment by the children. PE and games equipment is fully deployed by the specialist staff to provide much stimulus and opportunity for the pupils’ physical development. A good range and variety of musical instruments enables the pupils to produce an interesting programme of music for assemblies, and they are given plenty of opportunities to present and celebrate their achievements. Consequently, pupils in both sites enjoy their music, sing and play well in unison and harmony, and do so with great enthusiasm.
- 2.33 Pupils’ work is regularly and thoroughly marked within the guidelines of the school assessment policy. Most teachers enter useful comments to help them improve and many set targets for improvement. Some outstanding examples of assessment in Year 5 literacy provide exemplary material from which the whole school could benefit. The pupils in this case acknowledged the boost in their understanding and attainment received by good marking and assessment. The use of comments on pupils’ work is not applied consistently across the school, although all the pupils interviewed state that their teachers go over class- and homework, indicating mistakes and strategies for improvement.
- 2.34 Teachers have very high expectations of behaviour, as do the pupils themselves. The good lesson preparation and organisation and the choice of stimulating and interesting work ensures that the pupils are fully and enjoyably engaged in most lessons. Relationships between the teachers and pupils are excellent on the whole, and add to the friendly and productive working atmosphere. Pupils for the most part present their work with care and pride, and show respect for the school resources, fittings and buildings. They cooperate with their teachers and each other in various ways, for

example, in assembling and disassembling PE and games equipment safely after activities.

- 2.35 The school's performance management system uses various pupil performance indicators to evaluate progress and set targets for improvement. Some of these indicators are derived from teachers' marking and assessment of class- and homework, and some through various national and standardised tests at various stages and classes. The senior management team applies these various tests effectively to measure pupils' relative performance and performance over time. Not all class teachers are as familiar with the externally marked standardised tests, and consequently do not employ them effectively to refine their setting of pupils' targets for improvement. The school has identified this as an issue for staff training in the current school development plan.
- 2.36 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 Arrangements for pupils' pastoral care, welfare health and safety are excellent, and are firmly rooted in the comprehensive range of clearly written policies and effective systems of support embraced and implemented effectively by all the staff. The policies address all regulatory matters and reflect relevant Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidelines. The previous inspection report described pastoral care as a major strength of the school and since then the school has built on this strength.
- 3.2 Staff provide excellent and constant support and encouragement to their pupils. Consequently, pupils feel known and emotionally secure, and confidently turn to their teachers for advice and guidance should the need arise. Teachers promote pupils' self confidence over a wide range of activities by support and encouragement, and through the system of positive rewards to develop their esteem and confidence. Pupils respond well to all forms of encouragement; they feel safe, secure and well supported in their endeavours. High standards of behaviour are expected at all times. Codes of discipline, together with an effective anti-bullying policy, are known and understood by all pupils, and the "Golden Rules" are posted around the school as a reminder. Pupils say that bullying is rare but, in the event, dealt with summarily by the staff. The School Council enables the pupils to be appropriately involved in welfare matters and they participate with intent. The rare instances of poor behaviour are dealt with effectively and without fuss and sanctions are applied justly, when necessary. Staff are well briefed in the use of sanctions in a way which respects the dignity of the child. Topics in circle time, PSHE, and assemblies strengthen and reinforce the school's effective pastoral system. Overall responsibility for pastoral care lies with the senior management team, three of whom, the deputy head and the two assistant deputy heads, have daily responsibility for pastoral care in the two different school sites. They sympathetically and effectively support staff in carrying out their pastoral duties, and ensure that the pastoral procedures are reviewed and monitored.
- 3.3 The school's system of rewards, merits and house points actively contributes to pupils' sense of achievement success and well being. Pupils' good attitudes and deeds, together with their achievements in academic and other pursuits, are regularly celebrated in school assemblies and serve to strengthen the school values and ethos. The result of these measures is that the boys are self-disciplined and supportive of each other.

- 3.4 The measures to ensure the health, safety and well being of all pupils are very effective. Appropriate strategies are in place to deal with risks from fire and other hazards. A full range of documents and policies, based on DfES guidelines, provide clear guidance to staff, and risk assessments are carried out on all activities in and away from the school, and closely monitored and reviewed by the bursar. All issues raised by the most recent fire authority report have been addressed. The bursar is the designated health and safety officer and chairs the health and safety committee, which has representation from all sections of the school including the governors. Provision for first aid and for children who are ill is satisfactory. Buildings, premises, fittings and equipment are well and safely maintained and kept in a clean and tidy state. Overall, the school is a safe and secure environment. Teachers are well aware of safety issues, especially in PE and art and design and, where appropriate, teachers and support staff have received training in the safe maintenance and application of power tools.
- 3.5 Effective child protection policies are in place and all staff have recently completed training in child protection. The headmaster, as the appointed child protection officer, however, has not yet received training in inter-agency matters, as required by regulations.
- 3.6 The school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) Ensure that the child protection officer is fully trained in inter-agency working. [Regulation 3(2)(b)]

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.7 The school has good links with parents and the wider community. Over half the parents replied to the pre-inspection questionnaire and the overwhelming majority expressed their satisfaction with the education and support provided to their children. The school had employed an outside consultancy to undertake a survey of parents' views shortly before the inspection, which also indicated that parents were satisfied with the education provided. Parents have plenty of opportunities to be involved in the school and in the work and progress of their children. The very active parents' association provides ample opportunity for parents to meet socially and exchange views about the school. They help in various ways in the school, including assemblies, art days in the infants, and in RE projects in the Nursery. They also help in the library, the orchestra and in transport for sports fixtures. The school has every intention of building on and improving these good links and relationships, and has identified links with parents and the community as a priority for further improvement in the current development plan.
- 3.8 Parents are provided with good information about the school and receive clear and useful reports about their children's work and progress. A number of different ways are used to communicate with parents. These include termly progress reports for juniors and half-termly reports for infants, parent consultation and information evenings, regular newsletters, the parents' handbook, the prospectus and the school website. The website, a relatively recent creation, is updated regularly and has copies of all school policies. Parents meet teachers informally on a regular basis, for example, while dropping off children in Nursery and Reception, when information on welfare and academic matters is exchanged. The headmaster, deputy head and assistant deputy heads are usually available to meet parents informally before and after school. The school handles parents' concerns with due care and attention.
- 3.9 The school has good links with the community. The choir perform three carol concerts in local churches, including Manchester Cathedral, as well as competing in local and regional choir and music festivals. The pupils of all ages are very actively involved in raising funds for a number of national and international charities and

relief agencies. The school has close curricular links in modern languages with two grammar schools in which teachers share good practice. A number of outside speakers visit the school, for example a youth worker for the local parish church at harvest festival and representatives from the Hale synagogue, all of which enhances provision for social, moral and cultural development. Numerous sports teams participate in fixtures and tournaments in the area and during the week of the inspection, the school hosted the Northern ISA cross-country championships.

- 3.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The quality of governance is good. The role of the governing body, whose members are the directors of the limited proprietary company, is clearly defined, enabling the governors to provide effective oversight of the school's financial and educational activities. They achieve this through their regular business meetings, their visits to the school, and the good relationship between the chair of governors and the headmaster. Their strategic vision, which encompasses planning to unite both parts of the school onto one site in the foreseeable future, is clear and purposeful, although not all elements in the strategic plan have clear time scales.
- 4.2 The governors are aware of their financial responsibilities, working with the headmaster and bursar to establish appropriate budgets, which are rigorously monitored, and to provide adequate resources for the school. A visit by an approved independent school bursar last term found that the arrangements for the school's financial management were sound.
- 4.3 The governors employ an independent educational consultant to monitor and report on the performance of the headmaster. This helps them to set objectives for the headmaster, which enable him to provide high quality education for the pupils with appropriate investment in resources and staff training.
- 4.4 The governors have a good insight into the workings of the school. They have a representative on the health and safety committee and on appointment boards for new teaching staff. They attend school functions, such as sports days and open evenings. They provide the headmaster and staff with appropriate guidance and challenge, with the annual performance management system making an effective contribution to the monitoring and development of all staff.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The school is well managed and lead. The clear educational direction and leadership of the headmaster and the senior management team is reflected in the high educational attainment of the pupils, in the outstanding provision for pastoral care and welfare, and the excellent standard of pupils' personal development. This enables the school to fulfil its aims and maintain its positive ethos. The effective management of the headmaster and management team has brought about improvements in the educational experience of the pupils by introducing a broader curriculum and a greater variety of teaching methods since the last inspection.
- 4.6 A wide range of plans, policies and procedures has been produced on all appropriate aspects of the school for the guidance of staff. The annual development plan identifies a range of appropriate priorities, although the success criteria are not always

clear. The performance management policy, introduced by the present headmaster, is a clear and comprehensive document and is used to evaluate teachers' performance for threshold salary payments, to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, and to set and review teachers' targets. It is not yet sufficiently embedded in school practice to enable all subject coordinators to monitor the implementation of subject policies across the two school sites. For example, the monitoring and management of the Early Years section presents a particular challenge, because the nursery and two reception classes are on different sites.

- 4.7 The headmaster is effective in securing and supporting well qualified and experienced staff who fully embrace the aims and the objectives of the school, and thus contribute to its continued success. All the appropriate statutory checks are made on staff prior to their appointment.
- 4.8 Financial resources are well managed by the headmaster, supported by the bursar, to secure the provision of appropriate educational resources to meet the school's educational aims and the needs of the pupils. Thus new computers have been installed in the main school and interactive whiteboards have been installed, one on each site, in order to raise the profile of ICT across the curriculum. Subject coordinators do not have their own budgets but receive a positive response from the headmaster to requests for expenditure. For example, a major whole-school resource for RE was purchased last year.
- 4.9 The day-to-day running of the school is administered effectively by the headmaster, ably assisted by the deputy head and two assistant deputy heads, as well as the efficient and friendly office staff and bursar, who all work hard to obviate the intrinsic problems of running a school on two sites. The catering staff provide nutritional meals and their friendly relationships with the pupils add to the overall excellent quality of care. The maintenance and cleaning staff keep the school in a safe and clean condition.
- 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 school meets its aims and aspirations by providing an excellent academic education leading to entry, for most Year 6 leavers, to selective grammar schools in the area. It succeeds in developing self-confident pupils who have developed good working habits and self-discipline. Most have developed interests outside their schoolwork, predominantly but not exclusively in sport and music. Parents are generally pleased with the education provided and strongly subscribe to the aims of the school.
- 5.2 The last inspection report in 2000 made two main recommendations: firstly, that teachers should differentiate learning tasks to better meet pupils' individual needs, especially in relation to the more able pupils; and secondly, to improve the standards of pupils attainment in ICT by developing appropriate expertise, resources and facilities. The school has made reasonable progress in relation to both these recommendations, as described in 5.3 and 5.4 below.
- 5.3 Many lesson plans now contain extension material to challenge the most able pupils, but not yet consistently so. The school has recently appointed a coordinator to

develop programmes for gifted and talented pupils, and early morning classes in literacy and numeracy are provided. A similar appointment was recently made to cater for pupils with EAL. It is too soon, however, to evaluate the impact of these initiatives. Provision for SEN pupils is very good, and results in rapid progress for these pupils.

- 5.4 The school has invested in good quality resources for ICT and has recently appointed a specialist coordinator. This initiative has had a positive impact on standards in ICT lessons, but ICT applications across the whole curriculum are underdeveloped. The current development plan has identified the need to improve ICT provision across the whole school curriculum.
- 5.5 There is still some work to be done, therefore, to address fully the two key issues raised in the last inspection.
- 5.6 The school complies with almost all of the regulatory requirements, but does not at present fully meet Standard 3 (welfare, health and safety of pupils).

Next Steps

- 5.7 In order to build on the improvements made since the last inspection, the school should:
1. Develop the role of the recently appointed gifted and talented coordinator to
 - identify, promulgate and monitor strategies currently in practice to challenge the most able pupils,
 - produce a programme to provide suitable activities for pupils who are gifted and talented across all subjects and activities in the school curriculum, and implement it successfully;
 2. Ensure that the needs of pupils who have English as an additional language are clearly and accurately identified, and that all teachers contribute to improving provision for them where appropriate.
 3. Continue the current efforts to improve ICT provision, especially through developing the expertise of all staff to use ICT as an aid to teaching in their respective subject areas and phases,
 4. Provide the opportunity for all subject coordinators, including the Early Years coordinator, to operate effectively across the two sites, in particular with regard to the monitoring of standards of teaching and learning.
- 5.8 In order to meet all the regulatory requirements, the school must:
- (1) Ensure that the child protection officer is fully trained in inter-agency working. [Regulation 3(2)(b)]

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 6th to 9th February 2006. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed 44 lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

- 6.2 A bursar from another school joined the reporting inspector on the 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

Tim Kilbride	Former head, HMC School; Ofsted additional inspector
Barry Duckett	Former head, ISA school
Sara Robinson	Headmistress, IAPS Pre-preparatory school
Jane Shinn	Deputy head, ISA school
Richard Walden	Headmaster, ISA school