

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Ashford School

Full Name of the School	Ashford School
DCSF Number	886/6000
Early Years Number	EY 344143
Registered Charity Number	1093277
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Age Range (of the whole school)	3 months to 18 years
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	9th to 12th February 2009
Head of Early Years Setting	Mr Richard Yeates
Early Years Age Range	3 months to 5 years
Early Years Gender	Mixed
Early Years Foundation Stage Inspection Dates	26th and 27th January 2009

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. The inspection was carried out by ISI, a body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting EYFS provision in schools belonging to the ISC Associations. Section 7 of this report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the EYFS Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the Statutory Framework for children's learning, development and welfare, known as the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Ashford School is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged three to eighteen years, with its own pre-nursery, Bridge House, for children aged three months to three years. The school was founded in 1898 as a school for girls and it moved to the present Ashford town centre site in 1913. It became part of the United Church Schools Trust (UCST) in 1999, which operates ten independent and fifteen state-funded academies across England. In 2005 a merger with Friars School, a local co-educational preparatory school, led to the formation of a new preparatory section, Ashford Friars Preparatory School and, at the same time, Ashford's senior school changed from single-sex to co-education. Every year group will be mixed from September 2009, although Year 11 remained as girls only at the time of the inspection. The council of UCST has overall responsibility for the school and provides a policy framework; day-to-day governance is undertaken by the local governing body. The whole school is managed by the overall head; however, its day-to-day operational management is delegated to the headmaster of the preparatory school and the director of the senior school.
- 1.2 The school aims to promote self-reliance, responsibility, compassion and boldness, and to foster a sense of teamwork, the intellectual freedom to be creative, the confidence and enterprise to initiate and the resilience to cope with adversity. It aims to prepare every pupil for future life in an increasingly competitive and complex world. It is committed to developing 'adventurous learning'.
- 1.3 The school occupies two sites. The senior school is situated in the centre of Ashford and the preparatory school is located in the nearby village of Great Chart. At the time of the inspection, the pre-preparatory department was housed on the senior school site, awaiting an imminent move to new buildings under construction on the Great Chart site. The whole school has undergone a programme of substantial refurbishment, acquiring new and improved facilities since the last ISI inspection in 2003. Considerable changes have taken place in the school's management since that time: the current overall head took up his post in 2005 and both parts of the school have reorganised management structures.
- 1.4 Pupil numbers throughout the school have increased significantly since the time of the last inspection. At the time of the current inspection, the school had 833 pupils aged from three months to 18 years. At Bridge House 65 girls and 61 boys attended the day-care provision for children under the age of three, with 114 of these being part-time. The preparatory school had 315 pupils, 153 boys and 162 girls. In its Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children up to the age of five years, 69 children were attending part-time in the Nursery and 25 children attended full-time in the Reception class, one more than at the time of the EYFS inspection. Seventy pupils were in Years 1 and 2 and 151 pupils in Years 3 to 6. The senior school had 392 pupils, 139 boys and 253 girls, 252 of these were in Years 7 to 11 and 140 in the sixth form.
- 1.5 The 123 senior school boarders are recruited predominantly from overseas, with an increasing number of mainland Europeans joining the large numbers from China and other parts of South-East Asia. Day pupils are drawn from Ashford itself and from the surrounding area, some pupils travelling by train or coach from places such as Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone, Hastings, Maidstone, Faversham and Sittingbourne. The school is committed to providing fee support where possible and 154 pupils were in receipt of UCST bursaries and scholarships at the time of the inspection.

- 1.6 Entry to the school at all ages is normally dependent on the candidate's performance in the school's own entrance tests, although assessment for the youngest children is less formal. Ashford Friars Preparatory School pupils have automatic entry to the senior school, but Year 11 pupils are expected to gain a minimum of six A*-C grades at GCSE, with B grades in their intended A level subjects, to continue into the sixth form. Some pupils transfer to local maintained grammar schools and other schools and colleges at ages eleven and sixteen; significant numbers of new pupils are recruited at 11+ and into the sixth form, the latter mainly boarders from overseas. The results of standardised tests taken by pupils in both the preparatory and senior school indicate that the average ability of the pupils is above the national average, with some pupils well above and others below. If the pupils are performing in line with their abilities their results in national tests and public examinations will be above the average for all maintained schools.
- 1.7 At the time of the inspection two pupils in the senior school had a statement of special educational need (SEN), one funded by the local authority and one by their parents. The school had identified 132 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), 72 in the preparatory school and 60 in the senior school, and 33 preparatory and 20 senior pupils were receiving specialist learning support. One hundred and ten pupils did not have English as their principal language, 106 in the senior school and four in the preparatory school; 73 of these were receiving specialist English as an additional language (EAL) tuition.
- 1.8 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.
- 1.9 See Section 7 for the report on the Early Years Foundation Stage.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The educational experience is good and consistent with the school's aim of providing pupils with an all-round education. The academic programme is well balanced and complemented by a strong emphasis on co-curricular activities. The extensive range of opportunities enables pupils to flourish. Provision in the EYFS is outstanding.

Preparatory School

- 2.2 Pupils are provided with a wide range of educational experiences, both inside and outside the classroom during the course of an extended day. Children in the EYFS experience a stimulating and exciting environment based on exploration and discovery. For pupils in Years 1 and 2 an enquiry-based approach to learning encourages them to think for themselves in a fun way. Topic work consolidates the core curriculum. Throughout the preparatory school, the curriculum gives opportunities for pupils to achieve good standards of literacy and numeracy and to acquire skills of reasoning, speaking and listening. French is taught from Year 1. Varied and stimulating opportunities for pupils' creative and aesthetic development are offered in art, design and technology (DT), drama and music. Appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) provision enables pupils to develop computer skills from the nursery stage. Physical development is given a high priority. For example, physical education (PE), swimming and games offer a comprehensive 'sport for all' programme and teams, at all levels, compete locally.
- 2.3 The curriculum is planned effectively and provides equality of access and opportunity for all. Most schemes of work and handbooks provide a useful overview of the curriculum and reflect the many opportunities available to pupils.
- 2.4 Pupils' experience of personal, social and health, education (PSHE) fully supports the school's aims and ethos. The programme for PSHE and citizenship has been developed across the preparatory school and highlights the potential for good cross-curricular links. For instance, a session about caring for pets with younger pupils included discussion of a scientific and geographical nature. A visit and talk from a grandparent, accompanied by his guide dog, about 'overcoming blindness' helped to bring the subject to life. For older pupils, the introduction of MMESS (Managing Feelings, Motivation, Empathy, Self-esteem and Social Skills) has helped develop further the caring and sympathetic ethos.
- 2.5 Pupils' experiences and personal development are enhanced by the wide and diverse range of co-curricular activities. As well as a healthy balance of music and sport, pupils enjoy activities such as fencing, cookery, sign language, and the popular Bollywood club. Extended learning continues with a wide variety of local trips, such as the Year 1 Victorian Day in Maidstone. Visits abroad include the popular Years 5 and 6 skiing trip. The after-school club is well-attended and pupils enjoy the activities on offer. These opportunities strongly enrich the experience of all pupils.
- 2.6 Mathematics is set by ability from Year 3 and English from Year 4 which enables pupils to study with an appropriate level of academic challenge. Care is taken to identify and support pupils with learning difficulties and, for the most part, their needs are well met. Effective support in the classroom is provided by the learning support assistants. The special educational needs department maintains a good overview, working closely with teachers and parents and linking with the special educational needs co-ordinator in the senior school. In the pre-preparatory department, pupils are screened using an assessment programme and individual educational plans (IEPs) have been put in place where necessary, to support their

learning. The school recognises that this system has not yet been developed sufficiently for older pupils in the preparatory department and it has plans to remedy this. No pupils currently require special provision for EAL. Additional support for gifted and talented pupils is in its infancy.

- 2.7 Throughout the preparatory school, pupils are prepared appropriately for their next stage of education. Well-established procedures ensure a smooth continuity of education between each section of the school. The priority given to the personal development of children in the EYFS ensures they are confident and ready to move through to Year 1. At all stages, teachers hold detailed discussions and pass on appropriate records. A comprehensive report and visits by pupils and parents assist the transition. For pupils in Year 6, transition to the next stage is facilitated by the increased amount of specialist teaching and appropriate setting arrangements. They are well prepared academically, personally and socially for their move to secondary school.

Senior School

- 2.8 The educational provision in the senior school is good and it offers pupils many appropriate opportunities and experiences. Since the last inspection, the school has restructured its programme by establishing a two-week timetable with longer teaching periods, increasing the time allocated to games and introducing compulsory after-school activities for pupils in Years 7 to 9.
- 2.9 The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is broad and contributes effectively to the development of pupils' mathematical, scientific and linguistic skills; it includes separate sciences, Latin, French and German or Spanish. Pupils are able to explore their aesthetic, creative, physical and technological capabilities through well-planned courses in art, DT, drama, food studies, ICT, music and PE. The option system for GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11 ensures that pupils have a secure base of core subjects and are able to choose from a suitable range of additional subjects. A few pupils and parents requested an increased choice of subjects at GCSE in their interview or questionnaire responses, but the inspectors judged that a good range is available. Sixth-form students are able to choose from a large number of A-level subjects, including the recently introduced photography and psychology.
- 2.10 Detailed schemes of work have been produced for all subjects and curriculum planning is thorough and effective. The PSHE programme has been reviewed and improved; it includes weekly sessions led by tutors and talks by specialist staff and visiting speakers. Pupils acknowledge its relevance and its benefits to their personal development. The course has been well planned and is being carefully monitored.
- 2.11 The recently introduced activities programme is fulfilling its aim of enabling pupils to gain new experiences, although some parents and pupils expressed dissatisfaction with its compulsory nature. The activities observed were well-attended, meaningful and purposeful and conducted in a pleasant atmosphere. Pupils of different ages were enjoying one another's company and, in some cases, older pupils were leading sessions. Pupils are also given good opportunities to interact with the local community through sport, music, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and a work experience programme organised through parental or school contacts.
- 2.12 The school has significantly improved its provision for those with LDD. The learning support department monitors pupils' progress carefully. Those with SEN statements are very well provided for with good IEPs and carefully prepared annual reviews. Teaching staff are kept well informed of pupils' particular needs and are sensitive to them. If necessary, pupils receive individual support instead of modern language lessons or during private study

periods. The considerable numbers of pupils with EAL are also carefully assessed, monitored and supported to ensure that they are able to benefit fully from the curriculum. The EAL department regularly updates the pupil register, communicates with staff and gives pupils individual targets for their progress. Setting arrangements in Years 7 to 9 enable all pupils to work at a level suited to their abilities and pupils are moved between sets as appropriate. All departments have identified pupils who are gifted and talented in their subject but regular opportunities are not yet widely available for these pupils to explore and extend their interests.

- 2.13 Preparation for the next stage of education and adult life is thorough. The careers department is well-resourced and supports pupils through relevant tutorials, talks and presentations. From Year 9 onwards, all pupils benefit from an annual meeting to discuss their career options and many, particularly those in the sixth form, have additional consultations; however, the outcomes of these discussions are not currently shared formally with the staff responsible for the pupils' progress and welfare. The school uses the Independent Schools Careers Organisation effectively to supplement this programme: their visiting experts address whole year groups and provide specialist advice to many individuals. Pupils are given clear and accurate information about the process of university application and the range of courses available by well-informed school staff. Visits, guest speakers and seminars support this work appropriately.

Whole School

- 2.14 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.15 Pupils of all ages are well educated. They achieve good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills in accordance with the school's aims to help each boy or girl to develop independence of mind and spirit and to prepare them for future life. The school's aim of developing adventurous learning is not yet completely fulfilled.

Preparatory School

- 2.16 Pupils display good levels of skill, knowledge, understanding and application. They achieve well whatever their ability. Pupils with LDD make good progress, benefiting from the different tasks set and support given. In the EYFS, children demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning; they respond well to investigative tasks and show high levels of independence and creativity. They achieve good levels of literacy and numeracy and apply their skills with competence.
- 2.17 Pupils throughout the school read with increasing fluency. They write creatively and with imagination. They are articulate and speak with confidence about a range of issues, as shown when Year 6 pupils discussed the unique qualities of haiku poetry. Both pre-prep and prep pupils spoke with assurance in their respective assemblies in front of pupils, staff and parents. Pupils listen carefully to what others say and treat their answers with respect. Pupils' mathematical and numerical skills are well developed and applied effectively where needed in other subjects. Good examples were seen in a Year 5 class where pupils formulated a chart to compare average temperatures in London and central Brazil and in a Year 3 science lesson when pupils carefully carried out measurements as part of their topic on forces. When given the opportunity, pupils use their ICT skills well, and they enjoy working on the interactive whiteboards. In the best lessons, pupils think on their feet and reason for themselves. They are able to put together persuasive and cogent arguments giving reasons for their point of view. This was well illustrated in a discussion about the benefits of

the school rules as well as in an assembly on the advantages of perseverance. Where lessons are too directed the same opportunities are not always provided. High standards of achievement were seen in physical activities across the age range. Many outstanding examples of pupils' creative work in art and DT are on display throughout the buildings.

- 2.18 The national test results and the school's own standardised measures support the evidence of pupils' good learning and achievement. Children in the EYFS make good progress and by the end of Reception are well placed to achieve or exceed the nationally recognised Early Learning Goals in each area of learning. Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through the school. Results in national tests show that pupils' achievements are well above the national average for all maintained primary schools and represent good standards in relation to their abilities. The school has worked hard to improve achievement by targeting the teaching of creative writing. Pupils are successful in public examinations at 11+ and entry tests to senior schools.
- 2.19 Sporting and co-curricular activities are appreciated and well supported by the pupils. Most have the opportunity to achieve highly in a wide range of activities. Individuals and teams have enjoyed success in the South East Regional Schools' Biathlon, the National Triathlon Championships, a 5-a-side Under-9 soccer tournament and a poetry reciting competition. Many pupils reach high standards in instrumental music, dance and speech and drama examinations and some have had their writing published.
- 2.20 Pupils develop essential skills for work and study from an early age and their attitude towards these is positive. The foundations of good note-taking are securely laid in the older year groups. Homework diaries are well maintained and are a major aid to pupils' organisation. Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate good levels of co-operation when working in pairs and other small groups. This collaborative approach to learning is strongly nurtured; for example, in a Year 5 English lesson, pupils drew up a shared, adjectival lexicon based on a chapter of 'Charlotte's Web'.
- 2.21 Pupils of all ages enjoy their work and play, as demonstrated by pupils who had fun at the swimming club. They show concentration and put significant effort into their work. Pupils work hard, are full of life, enjoy what they do and they persevere.

Senior School

- 2.22 Pupils gain a good understanding and knowledge of the subjects they study. They reach good standards in co-curricular activities and are developing the appropriate skills and attitudes for work and life. Adventurous learning was particularly evident in some practical subjects such as art, food studies and ICT, where pupils are clearly confident in taking risks and enjoy the challenge of independent thinking.
- 2.23 Pupils are articulate; most are confident speakers and write fluently. Their numeracy skills are well developed and are used effectively in subjects such as chemistry, economics, geography and physics for analysing and evaluating data. Pupils are confident and competent users of ICT, frequently word processing their work, researching on the internet, using spreadsheets, and making presentations in a wide range of subjects, such as history and modern languages. Increasingly good use is being made of the school's intranet and virtual learning environment. Pupils' creativity is stimulated, challenged and developed in varied and outstanding artwork, through activities such as "mini Masterchef" and in creative writing, music and drama. Able pupils discussed texts and debated issues with sharp and critical focus in some classes, for example, in sixth-form lessons in Latin, philosophy and psychology. When opportunities for independent thinking and learning are presented pupils

often respond with enthusiasm and rise to the challenge, but in less stimulating lessons they make less effort.

- 2.24 Pupils' attainment in the GCSE examinations is good overall in relation to their abilities. In the last three years for which comparative data was available at the time of the inspection, GCSE results were well above the average for all maintained schools and the 2008 results were similar to those in previous years. The A-level results for the three years 2005 to 2007 were well above the national average for all maintained schools and the 2008 results were better than those of the previous year. These results represent good attainment in relation to the pupils' abilities. Analysis using nationally standardised measures of progress indicates that at both GCSE and A-level pupils make progress above national norms. All these examination results are for girls only, as the first cohorts of boys will sit A-level examinations in 2009 and GCSE in 2010.
- 2.25 Pupils with LDD and EAL make particularly good progress and achieve very well in relation to their abilities. The school is aware that the most able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged and is exploring ways to raise their levels of achievement still further.
- 2.26 School teams and individual pupils achieve distinction in a wide range of activities. For example, cross-country, hockey and tennis teams enjoy regular success in local and regional tournaments, while individual pupils not only represent their county but have also gained national rankings in biathlon, triathlon, fencing and tennis. Gifted mathematicians participated in the final of the UK Mathematics Trust Team Challenge during the week of the inspection; pupils of all ages regularly achieve gold medals in the UK Maths Challenges and participate in the Maths Olympiad. Pupils have achieved bronze medals in the Biology, Chemistry and Physics Olympiads as well as success in national team quizzes in science. The school has won an inter-schools' photography competition in several recent years. Debating is a strength, with success in local and regional competitions. Pupils achieve numerous distinctions in examinations in music and in speech and drama.
- 2.27 Most pupils are able to take appropriate notes independently and to organise their work well. Pupils co-operate very well in group work and when working in pairs. They are supportive and encouraging of one another. In a minority of lessons, the poor behaviour of a few pupils disrupted others and slowed the pace of learning. The newly introduced code of conduct for behaviour in lessons was not yet being adhered to by some pupils.
- 2.28 The library, which was criticised in the last inspection, has been replaced by a spacious modern learning resources centre. This is very much at the heart of the school and is greatly appreciated and well-used by the pupils. The combination of books, computers, DVDs and videos enables research and enrichment of all kinds and the environment certainly inspires independent study.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.29 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is good overall, while the social and cultural awareness of pupils in the senior school is outstanding. The school fulfils its aims in this respect, in particular in promoting pupils' self-reliance, responsibility, confidence and compassion. Pupils' development is well supported within a broadly Christian ethos. Children's personal development in the EYFS is excellent.

Preparatory School

- 2.30 Pupils demonstrate well-developed spiritual awareness. It is implicit throughout the school, in its ethos and in the example set by teachers. Pupils show considerable confidence and a good degree of self-knowledge. This was evident in an assembly where pupils identified sensitive parts of their character as goals for improvement. They are well-mannered and thoughtful in their relationships with each other. Teachers build pupils' self-esteem by ensuring they are highly valued and encouraged to become the best they can be. In assemblies and through the house system, pupils' self-esteem and confidence is further promoted when they receive praise and celebrate success. In circle time, PSHE and MMESS pupils explore their own feelings and demonstrate a growing understanding of how feelings and emotions affect others. Year 3 pupils thought carefully about how their own behaviour affects others when deciding on the difference between making an excuse and taking responsibility for their actions. Through art, poetry and music, pupils reflect upon the world around them. Pupils' spiritual dimension is enhanced by the contribution of the chaplain and the links with the local church.
- 2.31 Pupil's moral development is good. Relationships between pupils and staff are trusting and respectful. Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of their moral obligations to one another and have a clear understanding of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. For younger pupils this is re-enforced through the implementation of golden rules and golden time. For example, pupils acknowledge the importance and fairness of playground rules by signing them. For older pupils, these rules are embodied in the code of conduct. Not only do pupils know the rules but they also abide by them. Pupils frequently take the trouble to help and support each other. They engage confidently in ethical debate on topics such as bullying.
- 2.32 Pupils show a high degree of social awareness. For the very youngest pupils, this is fostered through play activities, when they demonstrate respect and concern for one another. Throughout the school, pupils with special responsibilities are proud of the contributions they make and explain their roles clearly and maturely. The development of a school council has encouraged pupils to 'have a voice' and help organise daily activities. Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate a growing sense of social responsibility for others in the wider community supporting charities such as the Kinjabe Trust in Kenya. They develop a knowledge of public services, for example through visitors from the police and fire services. Older pupils understand how the British government works and know the names of some of its more prominent members. The relationships between different age groups are happy and relaxed and this is particularly evident at lunchtime, which is a welcoming and social occasion.
- 2.33 Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the diversity of their community and the world in which they live. They gain much personal enrichment from subjects such as French, literature, drama and music, and through external visits, through involvement in school events and productions, and through interesting and vibrant displays of art and sculpture around the buildings. Their learning about other cultures and faiths is enhanced by the positive input from parents who come in to share their expertise and knowledge. In a Year 1 religious education (RE) lesson, pupils understood the significance of candles, not only in Christianity but also in Hinduism and Judaism. Year 6 pupils articulated the need to show respect for other cultures and traditions, an approach supported by work in RE.

Senior School

- 2.34 Pupils develop good spiritual awareness through acquiring self-knowledge and exploring values and beliefs. The high quality artworks of all kinds displayed around the school not only demonstrate the sensitivity and insight of their creators, but also inspire other pupils to reflection and contemplation. Musical performances are uplifting, with the soloists themselves profoundly moved by their chosen pieces. In RE lessons, pupils are challenged to think for themselves and to examine their own values and beliefs. Personal feelings are explored and self-esteem is successfully encouraged within PSHE. Assemblies are less effective in developing pupils' spiritual awareness. Some house assemblies were well led by pupils, but others did not offer a meaningful experience.
- 2.35 Pupils develop well morally; the majority show kindness and courtesy at all times. For instance, Year 10 pupils thanked their teacher for a particularly inspirational lesson. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong. Moral topics are thoughtfully discussed in many lessons; for example, in a chemistry lesson, Year 9 pupils responded with concern to the implications of supplies of crude oil running out. Sixth-form linguists develop their understanding of issues such as the morality of civil war and drama students explore the ethics of topics such as colonialism.
- 2.36 Pupils' social development and their contribution to the life of the school community are excellent. Pupils interact well within their year groups and with those of other ages. They are confident and assured, demonstrating particular concern for those who are younger; all girl boarders have a big or little "sister" whom they care for and befriend. The sixth-form leadership team provide impressive role models who have quickly established the new school council as a significant voice. Pupils have risen well to the challenge to contribute to the development of the school. They have discussed proposals confidently and presented their ideas to staff, including those for improving assemblies, recycling, more water fountains and healthy eating. Pupils of different ages show a good awareness of current affairs, political and economic issues and public institutions. Older pupils work as valued volunteers within the local community, helping with Brownies, Cubs and baby ballet classes as well as assisting in the preparatory school.
- 2.37 Pupils' cultural development is outstanding. Pupils of many different nationalities are happily integrated and the school celebrates different cultures enthusiastically. The boarding houses host regular 'International Talent Show' evenings, which are enjoyed by day pupil guests as well as the boarders. The whole school eagerly joined in spectacular Chinese New Year celebrations. Beautiful textile works illustrate pupils' sensitive appreciation of African art, which they have been studying. In drama, pupils enjoy exploring the similarities and differences between the conventions of pantomime and Peking opera. Creative writing by pupils of all ages, for example on Christmas traditions by Year 7, demonstrates high levels of cultural awareness. Pupils' development is enhanced still further by regular visits from authors and other speakers and by trips to the theatre and exhibitions. Music plays a leading part in both their social and cultural development: more than 80 voices of all nationalities form the main school choir, and talents shine in a wide variety of other groups, from rock to chamber music.

Whole School

- 2.38 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.39 The quality of the teaching is good overall and promotes the aims of the school well. It contributes significantly to pupils' progress in all years. The use of assessment information has much improved since the last inspection, although the quality of marking is inconsistent in the senior school. Adults make a very positive contribution to children's learning and development in the EYFS.

Preparatory School

- 2.40 Teaching helps pupils of all abilities, including those with LDD, to make good progress, increase their understanding and develop their skills. Pupils who need additional support are usually well provided for, but in a few instances, reasoning skills for the most able are not fully extended when teaching is too directed or extension activities lack challenge.
- 2.41 Teaching fosters pupils' ability to apply themselves to their tasks and develops their ability to think and learn for themselves. Teachers regularly question pupils, providing opportunities for them to talk about what they have learned; for example, Year 1 pupils made thoughtful and appropriate comments about what happened in a story. In the best lessons, teachers encourage pupils to take intellectual risks and to work creatively and collaboratively in pairs or small groups to solve a challenge.
- 2.42 Teaching encourages pupils to behave responsibly and to enjoy learning. Most classes are ordered and well behaved, although there were some instances of excessive calling out in a few lessons. Year 5 pupils enjoy their maths puzzle days and a group of Year 2 pupils were delighted with the monsters which they had designed and made. Positive support and encouragement are given by the award of stickers and house points and by schemes such as Year 4's 'star of the week' or the younger pupils' weekly celebration assembly.
- 2.43 In all lessons, teaching demonstrates appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and the age group being taught. Effective use is made of individual teachers' skills and specialisms and all pupils benefit from being taught by an enthusiastic and committed staff. Teachers know their pupils well. The good adult/pupil ratios in Years 1 and 2 are particularly beneficial.
- 2.44 Lesson planning is good and in several instances it was exemplary. The best examples are detailed and show appropriate awareness of the differing abilities and needs of the pupils. Reviews of performance in standardised tests, lesson evaluations and the tracking of pupils' progress are all used well to aid planning. However, on a few occasions, the pace was too slow and this restricted the benefits some pupils derived from these lessons.
- 2.45 Resources are good and are mostly used effectively. A variety of well-chosen activities and resources ensure that pupils in Years 1 and 2 have a secure foundation on which to build. Many teachers use the recently introduced interactive whiteboards skilfully, although this is not yet universal. The well-equipped ICT suites are utilised effectively for ICT lessons, but their contribution to the broader curriculum is limited. A wide range of visits outside the school coupled with the visits of speakers, writers and illustrators gives good support for work inside the classroom. Good facilities for swimming and well maintained all-weather pitches enrich the teaching of PE and games. An attractive library has been developed for the younger pupils. Striking displays of pupils' work are a strong feature of the school: an exciting combined textiles and geography project depicting landmarks in Kent was amongst several excellent cross-curricular examples.

- 2.46 Pupils' work is marked frequently, consistently and with the aim of encouragement. The best marking offered careful suggestions on how to improve, although this was not consistent across all subjects. The school has invested much time in developing and implementing systems of assessment that track pupils' performance. The school has identified literacy as a focus, in particular reading competence. Test results are used to aid teachers' planning and to prompt additional support for literacy. Considerable time and teacher and support staff input are used well to assist pupils with reading and, more recently, writing skills. However, outside the core subjects, information from assessment data is not being used as rigorously to inform teachers' planning.
- 2.47 The school places considerable emphasis on measuring attainment in relation to national standards, and this has progressed furthest in the core subjects. A selection of age-appropriate tests is employed to evaluate pupils' performance. These include standardised tests, the school's own assessments and measures of verbal and non-verbal reasoning. Particular care is taken at the points of transfer at age seven and eleven, where reading and spelling ages, analysis of test data, and detailed information about individuals' progress help teachers to be aware of their new pupils' needs.

Senior School

- 2.48 Teaching is supportive and is usually well planned, enabling pupils to acquire and extend their knowledge and understanding. The best teaching stimulates pupils and encourages them to develop their reasoning skills and powers of analysis. Good use is often made of the time allocated and of a wide range of resources. Appropriate homework is set. In some outstanding lessons, careful attention was given to ensuring that a variety of strategies was used, a lively pace was maintained and pupils were challenged and made rapid progress. However, an over-reliance on worksheets in some subjects limits pupils' opportunities for independent thought. As some lessons progressed, momentum was lost and the planned activities were not completed.
- 2.49 Teachers know their pupils well; they are committed to them and provide support and guidance which enable pupils to develop their varied talents and potential. Teachers are knowledgeable and usually enthusiastic about their subjects. They encourage appropriate behaviour, and relationships in the classroom are very often good. Most pupils are highly co-operative and do all that is expected of them, even when the teaching is undemanding. In some lessons teachers did not enforce the recently adopted code of conduct and the inappropriate behaviour of a few pupils slowed everyone's progress.
- 2.50 The teaching meets the needs of most pupils and many teachers use effective strategies for those of differing abilities. Teachers are provided with detailed information about the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of their pupils, but, as yet, this is not used to its full potential. Teaching does not always provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils to stimulate their creativity and intellectual curiosity. The learning support department keeps all teachers well informed about, and assists in supporting, pupils with LDD. Useful training for staff who teach pupils with EAL is currently offered on an informal basis. Teachers were seen giving suitable assistance in class to pupils whose first language is not English.
- 2.51 Appropriate, high quality resources effectively support the teaching and meet pupils' needs. Text books, equipment and materials are up-to-date and well employed. Interactive whiteboards are used in almost every lesson, often to very good effect, for example in economics and geography. Specialist equipment particularly enhances the teaching of practical skills in the sciences, art and textiles. Displays of pupils' work in classrooms and in corridors around the school are colourful, well mounted and interesting. Well chosen,

outstanding examples of art, craft, textile and topic work support learning and celebrate pupils' achievement.

- 2.52 The marking of pupils' work varies in quality both within and across departments. The best, for example in classical civilisation, English and psychology, was frequent, detailed and included pertinent comments. Detailed marking policies have been produced by each department, but there was little evidence that they were being followed consistently in a number of subjects. Teachers regularly meet with individual pupils to discuss their work, but written comments on work are often very brief and do not always indicate to pupils how they might make progress.
- 2.53 Considerable information about pupils' abilities is obtained from the use of a range of nationally standardised tests, taken in Years 7, 9, 10 and 12. Teachers also set half-termly, termly and end-of-year tests, and record the results on the new school tracking system. All this information, together with data derived from other internal assessment, is beginning to be used well by tutors and teachers, in discussion with pupils, to set target grades for examinations. The systems for reporting on pupil performance, monitoring progress and setting targets all work well in isolation. However, as they are all stored on different databases, drawing together a full picture of a pupil's performance, progress and potential is difficult.

Whole School

- 2.54 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 overall quality of pastoral care and the arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils of all ages are outstanding. The school is highly effective in caring for all pupils' well-being and development in accordance with its aims.

Preparatory School

- 3.2 The quality of relationships between staff and pupils and amongst pupils is excellent. Teachers provide high quality support for pupils. Although it is class teachers who have the main responsibility for those in their charge, pupils are aware that they can turn to anyone in time of trouble. The actions of staff are well supported by effective pastoral arrangements. Appropriate guidance through clearly written policies and procedures and regular staff meetings to share information about pupils are effective in planning support for the pupils. Positive behaviour is encouraged and reinforced by clear guidance about rewards and sanctions which operate through the well-organised house system and head's assembly. Pupils thoroughly understand these systems and regard them as fair.
- 3.3 The staff provide excellent care for pupils' welfare and well-being. Procedures to guard against harassment and bullying are well understood and effectively managed by senior members of staff. Circle time, RE lessons, PSHE and MMESS give the pupils ample opportunities to discuss concerns and behavioural issues. Effective policies and procedures support staff in carrying out their pastoral duties. Pastoral concerns are highlighted at regular staff meetings. Matters are dealt with swiftly and comprehensive records are kept. Communications between the two sites are highly effective and enhanced by weekly meetings of the senior leadership team and daily visits by the preparatory school head to the pre-preparatory school.
- 3.4 Health arrangements for pupils are rigorous. Records of individual pupils contain useful information about their personal needs. A well-understood system highlights pupils' medical and dietary requirements. The school has a clear and helpful first-aid policy. Many staff have received first-aid training, several to the higher level. All accidents to pupils and staff are reported without delay and accident forms completed. An effective system records injuries and notifies staff and parents when required. Pupils are cared for appropriately if they are unwell during the day and have a suitable area where they can lie down if necessary. A clear policy and appropriate recording system are in place for the administration and safe storage of medicines.
- 3.5 The school promotes healthy eating and this is encouraged both through the curriculum and through posters and displays around the school. A wide choice of appetising food is provided at lunchtime including a salad bar. Regular exercise is encouraged through PE lessons and the wide variety of co-curricular sporting activities.

Senior School

- 3.6 Pastoral care is a strength of the senior school. The school offers a welcoming environment where pupils feel valued and happy. Pupils and staff know each other very well and a genuine family ethos prevails. Relationships between pupils are particularly good across the age groups. Pupils appreciate their secure relationships with their teachers and know to whom they can turn if they need help or support.

- 3.7 A valuable new house-based pastoral structure has recently been introduced which enables high quality specialist support for tutor groups in Year 7 and the sixth form, while allowing pupils in Years 8 and 9 and in Years 10 and 11 to work alongside one another within their house. The heads of houses now have a more rounded view of their pupils and the new system facilitates rapid monitoring and provision of good support for pupils. Tutors are a very effective first point of contact for pupils and offer appropriate advice and guidance. However, some tutors are still exploring the most effective ways of working within the new pastoral structure.
- 3.8 The school has an appropriate and well-understood anti-bullying policy and pupils are confident of receiving help if it were needed. They have ready access to independent advice and counselling from a range of adults, including a trained counsellor, the school nurses and the chaplain. The school council has been leading a review of the behaviour code and sanctions. Pupils feel that their concerns about inconsistency are being heard. Pupils certainly value the commendations system and the recent initiative to send congratulatory postcards home for good work.
- 3.9 Pupils follow a useful health-related fitness programme in PE and they are all aware of what is needed to achieve or maintain good health. Pupils made positive comments about recent improvements to the food offered in the dining room and, at the suggestion of the school council, healthy options such as fruit are now also provided in the atrium café.
- 3.10 The suitably equipped medical centre is staffed throughout the day by a team of well-qualified and effective nurses. All correct procedures, including that for the safe storage of medicines, are followed and accurate records are maintained. All boarders are registered with the school doctor and can easily attend the nearby surgery. The medical centre is a suitable size for a day school. Significant numbers of staff are qualified first-aiders and the school has a well-written, useful first-aid policy.

Whole School

- 3.11 The school has an appropriate policy and thorough procedures for child protection and these are clearly understood by staff. The designated child protection contacts attend regular external training courses, and in-school training days for all staff have been provided by experts at appropriate intervals. Criminal Records Bureau checks are made on all staff as part of the rigorously monitored appointment process.
- 3.12 Pupils' daily attendance is recorded and monitored electronically at the start of the day and, in the senior school, in every subsequent lesson. In the preparatory school pupils are registered twice daily and a paper system is used as back-up when pupils are involved in games or activities. The systems work efficiently and absences are quickly investigated. The school's admissions register is well kept on a computerised database and contains all the necessary information.
- 3.13 Health and safety is very well managed. The school has due regard for health and safety requirements and monitors the effectiveness of its arrangements. The very full and detailed health and safety policy is reviewed regularly. Each site has its own committee which meets at least once a term and reports back to governors. Matters that arise are dealt with efficiently. The school is regularly audited by professional risk management and safety advisers. Appropriate risk assessments are undertaken, fully documented and acted upon, including those for buildings, subject departments, science experiments, regular activities and specific trips and events both in and out of school. A comprehensive central register of incidents and accidents is kept so that patterns can be identified. Portable electrical appliance testing is carried out annually and all such equipment is clearly marked. Detailed records are

maintained of the extensive health and safety training undertaken by staff. Very good fire safety arrangements are in place; regular practices are held and good records, including evaluations, are maintained. During the inspection, the efficacy of the evacuation procedures was evident when a fire alarm was activated in the senior school; pupils and staff were assembled and checked efficiently.

- 3.14 The school ensures that all building work meets the necessary standards and keeps meticulous records. The school has drawn up a detailed accessibility plan which fulfils the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act and encompasses not only the buildings and environment but also the curriculum.
- 3.15 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

- 3.16 Links with the parents and wider community are positive and constructive and they contribute well to the successful achievement of the school's aims. In the preparatory school they are outstanding and in the senior school good. Much work has been done to develop local links since the last inspection.

Preparatory School

- 3.17 A high proportion of parents returned the pre-inspection questionnaire and they indicated strong support for the school. Parents were particularly satisfied with both the education and support offered to their children. The breadth of the curriculum, pastoral care, activities and the ethos of the school were identified as strengths. Developing confidence and broadening skills were frequently praised. A few parents were unhappy about the help provided to pupils with learning difficulties. Inspectors felt that these pupils are provided with good quality help in the classroom but that support systems, such as IEPs for individual pupils, are not yet fully developed.
- 3.18 The school enjoys excellent links with parents, who consider themselves involved and well informed. This is an important achievement, given the recent merger, split-site campus and current extensive building works. These challenges have been recognised by the school management, which has worked hard at communicating effectively with parents. The school is striving to develop even stronger links with them, especially those who do not come to the school frequently. Many appreciate the breakfast club, after-school club, and holiday club which offer them high quality wrap-around care for their children.
- 3.19 Parents are given many worthwhile opportunities to become involved in the work and progress of their children and in the activities of the school. For example, parents may support the school by helping with social and fundraising events. Some share a particular skill with the pupils or talk about their profession. The daily contact book for the very youngest children and the reading record book or homework diary for older pupils provide a further means of communication between home and school. Parents of the youngest children in the EYFS are welcomed into school at the start and end of the day when dropping off and collecting their children. This provides good opportunities for informal discussions with staff if there are any concerns. Teachers throughout the school are available before and after school and by e-mail. Parents report that staff know their children very well as individuals. They are invited into school frequently and enjoy the many recitals, plays and productions performed by the pupils. The school prides itself on maintaining an 'open door' policy and providing an atmosphere in which all are made to feel welcome.

- 3.20 The school has appropriate systems for communicating with parents. Prospective families are given a full set of publications which contain all the information required to form a realistic view of the school. Regular letters home keep parents fully up-to-date, and act as a conduit for news and other information. Parents and pupils are both kept well informed about the achievements and progress of the pupils. Reports are sent out each term and provide concise and helpful summaries of recent work, pupils' attainment and, in the core subjects, targets for improvement. These are supplemented by grades from standardised and diagnostic tests at the relevant times. Parents are encouraged to meet with teachers to discuss their children's work and progress at regular parents' evenings, or to make appointments at any other time. They appreciate how swiftly the school handles concerns, and that teachers make themselves available to discuss issues either without appointment, or by appointment on the same day.
- 3.21 The school has many positive and productive links with both the local and wider communities. The school has worked hard to extend and strengthen these links particularly with the local parishes. The school welcomes the use of its facilities by local groups at weekends and during the holidays. Pupils make good use of local facilities such as the church, library, fire station and local sports stadium. Many visitors are welcomed into the school such as music groups and representatives from the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. The school has increased its involvement with a nearby university by helping to train students. Pupils undertake some local community service, for example by singing in the town to raise money for local charities.

Senior School

- 3.22 Seventy-seven senior school parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire. They were generally happy with the education and support provided for their children. Many wrote individual comments in praise of the pastoral care. A few parents were dissatisfied with the information they received concerning their children's progress, but the inspectors found that reports are sent out regularly and appropriate parent-teacher meetings held. Each term, both a short and full report are sent home, including attainment and effort grades in each subject. The full reports include comments on progress in all subjects, reports from tutors and heads of house and an evaluation by the pupils themselves. Now that the new tracking system has been established, target grades are also being included each term. Reports are sent out ahead of the end of term, to allow parents to contact the school with any concerns. Parents' meetings are held annually for each year group, with the Year 7 parents attending an additional social event at the start of the year. Parents are satisfied with the way in which any concerns are handled.
- 3.23 Parents offer enthusiastic support to school events such as concerts, plays and sports fixtures. The school has an active parent-teacher association, which organises a good range of activities including a ball, wine-tasting and quiz evenings; governors and teachers support these events. All the necessary information about the school can be easily obtained by current and prospective parents. Regular newsletters and news items posted on the frequently updated website provide parents with a good picture of daily life at the school.
- 3.24 The school is strengthening its links with the local community. It has worked hard to change the perception that it is in Ashford, but not a part of it. The hall, swimming pool, other sports facilities and classrooms are often used by local groups, and the boarding houses are let out for most of the holidays, including to a local music group. For many years the choirs of two local schools have regularly joined forces with the Ashford School choir for rehearsals and performances. Pupils play in local charitable concerts and the school hosts prep and primary school music and drama days. The school is also involved, through the UCST, with other local schools, both independent and maintained.

- 3.25 Pupils themselves organise charitable fundraising events, mostly through their houses. Some older pupils are involved with the local Millennium Volunteers scheme, though no formal outreach programme is run by the school. Pupils also undertake a variety of community service as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Whole School

- 3.26 The school's formal complaints procedure is appropriate and clearly set out. Parents are made fully aware of it; it is available in the school and on the website. It was invoked on one occasion in the previous academic year and the correct procedure was meticulously followed. The complaints file is kept carefully and shows effective handling of any parental concerns or formal complaint. The vast majority of parents are satisfied with the way the school handles their concerns, reporting that they are dealt with promptly, sensitively and fairly.
- 3.27 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

- 3.28 The quality of boarding education is good. It successfully promotes the school's aims. The committed and caring boarding staff make a significant difference to the lives of the pupils. The overseas boarders have become increasingly well integrated into the whole school community since the last inspection. The recommendations of the last Commission for Social Care Inspection report, which took place in March 2006, before the expansion of boarding and the introduction of boy boarders, have all been satisfactorily addressed.
- 3.29 Pupils feel secure and happy. Excellent relationships exist between boarders of all ages and they are particularly supportive of one another. Each boarding house contains a wide range of ages and senior pupils readily take responsibility for the welfare of the juniors. Relationships between the staff and pupils are excellent. The atmosphere within the houses is very friendly, open and relaxed.
- 3.30 Boarders belong to the same houses as the day pupils, which further assists their integration into the life of the whole school. Day pupils often attend boarders' social events and invite boarders to their homes. An extensive programme of activities has been set up, both for weekday evenings and for the weekend. On Saturdays, appropriate outings are usually organised by a member of duty staff. A good range of other, mostly sporting, activities is available over the weekends. Boarders are able to visit the town on weekday afternoons and during the weekends and this freedom is much appreciated.
- 3.31 Accommodation is good in general, with en-suite rooms available to many sixth-form boarders; it is excellent in one house. The boarding houses offer pleasant, often generous, accommodation. They are mostly in good decorative order and repair. Appropriate facilities within the houses include small kitchens, laundry rooms and recreational equipment, such as pool tables, pianos, air-hockey tables, computers and television sets. The houses are comfortable and welcoming.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The good quality of governance has enabled the school to make substantial progress in many areas. Governors provide strong support which has contributed significantly to the school's success in establishing a viable and unified co-educational preparatory and senior school in a relatively short time. They are fully committed to the aims and purposes of the school and, in no small way, help staff to achieve their ambitions for the pupils.
- 4.2 The local governing body is accountable to the UCST council which has ultimate responsibility for the school. The two levels of governance are a strength in that they combine local control with the advantages of a larger organisation able to provide significant support and investment. The local governing body has been involved at all stages of the recent developments of the school and it acts as both a useful critical friend and a supportive body. It draws on a wide range of relevant expertise among its members. The school benefits greatly from their general support as well as their areas of specific interest. The local governing body and its preparatory school sub-committee meet termly; members of the senior leadership team attend these meetings to contribute and be informed.
- 4.3 Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities. They fulfil their obligations for monitoring both health and safety and child protection, and they ensure that policies relating to these are regularly and properly reviewed. Governors are provided with regular reports of educational and financial matters, enabling them to monitor the school's life and work effectively. Through effective financial planning, governors ensure the school is provided with good quality staff and material resources. They are committed to the school's continued educational development; work is well advanced for the relocation of the pre-preparatory department to the Great Chart site.
- 4.4 Governors have a clear insight into the working of the school. Relationships between governors and staff are enhanced by the regular visits made by governors linked to different parts of the school. Staff have opportunities to meet governors at various school and social events. Governors provide the school's leaders with much appreciated help, advice and, where appropriate, challenge, while recognising their operational autonomy.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The overall quality of leadership and management throughout the school is good and provides clear direction and high standards of education and care to enable pupils of all ages to succeed. The determination and strength of vision from the highest level of leadership are significant factors in enabling the fulfilment of the school's aims. The school structure has changed considerably since the last inspection but good progress has been made in improving the monitoring of the school's life and work, in reorganising its management structure at all levels, and in strengthening the leadership role of senior staff. The school is aware of the need to ensure that these changes, many of them recent and rapid, are consolidated. In the past three years, two preparatory schools have been successfully brought together, with a smooth transition to one school which has a clear sense of purpose and ethos and achieves its aims. Similarly the move to full co-education in the senior school is now almost complete and both boys and girls have been made to feel comfortable and valued.

- 4.6 An extremely comprehensive and detailed whole school five-year strategic plan was written in 2008. The school's strengths and weaknesses have been astutely analysed and many appropriate actions for improvement are encompassed within its 183 operational targets. These encompass both major and minor issues and some have already successfully been tackled. The sheer volume and pace of change has inspired many staff but seems daunting to others. Many initiatives are not yet fully embedded and there has been little opportunity for consolidation. Individual senior school departments have written useful development plans to support teaching and learning within their subject areas, but these are not yet linked to the whole school strategic plan.
- 4.7 In the preparatory school, the overall vision for the school is shared by the staff. They are enthusiastic about the improvements and possibilities arising from the new buildings, which will enable both the preparatory and pre-preparatory school to be accommodated on one site. The dedicated senior leadership team, together with the hard working staff, have done much to create and sustain a high level of educational provision and pastoral care throughout the school. Communication and consultation are purposeful and informative and enable all staff to make their views known and contribute to policy and practice. They have had a key role in producing the preparatory school improvement plan, which focuses strongly on the pastoral and educational needs of the pupils. Through thorough and effective self-evaluation the school demonstrates an accurate analysis of its needs.
- 4.8 The preparatory school senior leadership team provides consistently good quality support to the headmaster and also to their colleagues. Much has been done in a relatively short time to analyse and evaluate existing strengths and possible areas for development. Staff at all levels have helped to identify the preparatory school's needs, and have been particularly responsive in adapting to the challenges of change and the major reorganisations of recent years. This process is still evolving and further changes are envisaged as the school enters its next stage of development. The school has correctly identified the need to develop leadership capabilities and opportunities. A high priority has been afforded to establishing effective monitoring procedures and improving consistency in all practices and procedures. The development of a learning and teaching leadership team has helped subject leaders to clarify the aims of their subjects and develop strategies to improve standards and the pupils' skills. However, as the school is aware, this process is not yet rigorous enough to ensure improvements in the standard of teaching and marking in some subject areas.
- 4.9 In the senior school, there has been considerable reorganisation of management roles and responsibilities at every level. New job descriptions have been written and agreed, but staff are not yet confidently fulfilling these. The restructuring of the roles of middle managers of both academic subjects and pastoral areas has not yet been fully accomplished and new lines of responsibility are not completely understood by some staff and pupils. Monitoring and evaluation of these new structures are not yet effective.
- 4.10 Staff development throughout both parts of the school has a high priority. The programme of continuing professional development is strong and teachers are encouraged to attend courses. Feedback meetings are arranged and knowledge is shared with colleagues. The performance management system for teaching staff is thorough and is now being linked with professional development. All teaching staff are appraised annually. Lessons are systematically observed and teachers undertake self-evaluation and agree objectives and training needs. A formal appraisal system for all non-teaching staff has not yet been fully established, although some individuals have been appraised by staff from the UCST. The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and they receive appropriate and carefully planned support. Helpful and supportive arrangements enable all new staff to settle quickly. Thorough child protection and safe recruitment policies and procedures are

firmly in place. Effective procedures are in place for checking the suitability of staff, supply staff and governors; a meticulous record is kept in one centralised register.

- 4.11 The day-to-day administration of the school is unobtrusive, smooth and thorough. Effective communication systems ensure the school community are kept well informed. Financial, human and material resources are well managed to meet the needs of the pupils. The non-teaching staff in all areas are well deployed and make an important contribution to the well-being of the pupils and the fulfilment of the school's aims.
- 4.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.13 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 Ashford School has emerged from a period of reorganisation as a thriving all-age co-educational school where the whole community has a shared ethos. The school is successful in meeting most of its aims, although the aim of developing adventurous learning is not yet completely fulfilled. It enables pupils of all ages, including those with SEN, LDD and EAL, to flourish and achieve well but recognises that arrangements for challenging gifted and talented pupils of all ages and for supporting those with learning difficulties in the preparatory school are not fully in place. Pupils of all ages are well educated, enjoy school and are happy. Provision in the EYFS is outstanding. The academic programme is well balanced by the strong emphasis on co-curricular activities. Excellent relationships create a supportive learning environment to which pupils respond well. Pupils are articulate and confident, and they develop a positive attitude to study from an early age. They work very well together and are supportive and encouraging of one another, although a minority lack self-discipline in some lessons. Good teaching contributes significantly to pupils' progress in all years, but the quality of marking is inconsistent in the senior school. Sophisticated systems recently introduced for tracking senior school pupils' progress are not yet fully exploited. Excellent care is given to pupils' personal development and well-being. Arrangements to promote and protect pupils' welfare, health and safety are outstanding. The quality of boarding education is good and overseas boarders are well integrated. The school enjoys strong parental support and is forging ever stronger links with the community. Energetic and dedicated leadership, together with enthusiastic and hardworking staff, has enabled much to be achieved in a short time. The volume and pace of change has inspired many staff but has appeared daunting to others. As a result, many initiatives are not fully embedded and there has been little opportunity yet for consolidation. The school has astutely analysed its own strengths and weaknesses, and identified areas for development. The school is now developing its management structures by reorganising and distributing the responsibilities of senior leaders and managers to reflect more strongly the importance of teaching, learning and assessment across the whole school.
- 5.2 The school has made good progress in enriching and extending the curriculum and learning opportunities for the pupils. The revised PSHE and MMESS programmes which have been introduced have enhanced pupils' personal development. Changes made to the structure of the senior school timetable have enabled better use to be made of teaching time. A wider range of A-level subjects has been introduced, as have sporting opportunities for pupils of all ages. More ICT equipment has been provided throughout the school; it is employed skilfully by most teachers and used confidently by pupils. Many improvements have been made to the school's facilities, most notably the construction of the learning resource centre in the senior school, the extension of the preparatory school and the refurbishment of much of the boarding accommodation. The school has strengthened its systems for monitoring and evaluating its life and work but is aware that more needs to be done as it enters its next stage of development.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 In order to improve further the quality of education provided, the school should take the following steps.
1. Develop teaching strategies to meet the needs of all pupils more effectively, in particular the most able in the senior school, and ensure these are rigorously and regularly monitored.
 2. Develop the support systems for older pupils with particular needs in the preparatory school.
 3. Strengthen the use of the new systems for tracking assessment and pupil progress in the senior school.
 4. Consolidate the development of the roles and responsibilities of subject leaders in the preparatory school and of heads of departments and pastoral leaders in the senior school.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.
- 5.6 Any failures to meet EYFS requirements are detailed in Section 7.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 9th to 12th February 2009. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the co-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.
- 6.2 The Early Years Foundation Stage was inspected on 26th and 27th January 2009 by two inspectors. The inspectors observed sessions, talked to the children, examined samples of work, and held discussions with staff and governors. Comments from parents and carers were considered, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mrs Marion Gibbs	Reporting Inspector (Senior School)
Mrs Gail Purt	Reporting Inspector (Preparatory School)
Mrs Sheila Hayward	Assistant Reporting Inspector
Mr Ross Hunter	Head, overseas school
Dr Trevor Lee	Head, IAPS school
Mr Roger Outwin-Flinders	Head, IAPS school
Mrs Eileen Parris	Former Head, ISA school
Mrs Vivien Tabone	Former Head, ISA school
Mrs Dinah Barry	Head of Department, GSA School
Mr Richard Biggs	Head, HMC School
Mrs Sarah Dixon	Head, GSA School
Mr Toby Mullins	Head, HMC School
Mr David Williams	Deputy Head, HMC School
Mrs Elizabeth Coley	Early Years Lead Inspector
Mrs Susan Bennett	Early Years Team Inspector

7. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE (EYFS)

- 7.1 The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) of Ashford School offers education for children from three months to five years of age. At the time of the inspection, 65 girls and 61 boys attended the day-care provision for children under the age of three at Bridge House, with 114 being part-time. Thirty-six boys and 33 girls attended the Nursery classes (ages 3 to 4) of whom 56 were part-time. Fourteen boys and 10 girls, all of whom were full-time, attended the Reception classes (ages 4 to 5). Fifteen children have been identified as needing support with their learning, and one child is learning English as an additional language. No child has a statement of special educational needs. Approximately one in seven children comes from an ethnic background. The provision in Bridge House is open all year round and holiday care is offered to any children in the EYFS. The setting also offers after-school care for children in Nursery and Reception. The last Ofsted inspection of the Nursery and Reception classes was in September 2004, and the last Ofsted inspection of the day care and nursery education provided in Bridge House was in September 2007. The setting aims to provide a broad and balanced curriculum enabling each child to develop personally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically, creatively and intellectually to his/her potential; to value every child as an individual; to have happy, independent, motivated children with an enthusiasm for learning; and to establish an excellent relationship with parents.
- 7.2 The overall effectiveness of the provision in meeting children's needs is outstanding and successfully fulfils its aims. Across the setting, children demonstrate high levels of independence and creativity in many areas of learning. They respond well to investigative tasks, for example when Reception children explored the texture and properties of mud outdoors using plastic dinosaurs. The youngest children investigated the power of air by seeing how far they could blow thin strands of shredded paper. On entry to Reception, most children are achieving in line with, or above, age-related expectations in all areas of learning. During the year, they make effective progress according to their ability so that, by the time they enter Year 1, many of them reach a good level of achievement. Almost all have been working securely within the Early Learning Goals, and a significant number have been working beyond them.
- 7.3 Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding. Those in Reception know why visitors to the school wear badges, and they recognise potential dangers. In an under-3 activity, children knew that toasters were hot and would burn their skin. Older children recognise the importance of eating fruit and vegetables, which they bring from home each day for snacks, and they understand the need for hygienic routines before eating. They enjoy participating in a wide range of physical activities, particularly in the gymnasium and on their excellent outside play areas, and the ample floor space for the youngest children allows plenty of room for activity. At lunch time, the oldest children can choose what they want to eat from the very good range of healthy foods offered.
- 7.4 Children's attitudes towards learning are excellent and their enthusiasm indicates how much they are enjoying themselves. Their relationships with staff and each other are very strong; they talk freely about what they are doing; for example in the Nursery class, the children explained why they were using chopsticks in the café celebrating Chinese New Year. In after-school care, they enjoy the company of their friends and, throughout the day, they continually show respect for each other by taking turns and sharing equipment. The oldest children take responsibility by undertaking small tasks as 'helper of the day'. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents praised the amount of progress made by their children through play as a result of the high expectations of staff. Problem-solving skills are very well promoted, for example when the Nursery children were given triangles to place and

worked out how to make the shape of a diamond. Skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT are developed very well in the Nursery and Reception classes, but, for the youngest children, a lack of resources restricts opportunities for incorporating technology into their play.

- 7.5 Children are helped to learn and develop very effectively. Staff across the setting make excellent use of assessment to plan for children's future progress and parents have good opportunities to contribute to their children's developmental records. Comprehensive planning identifies and provides for each child's individual needs, ensuring that learning experiences are challenging and achievement is high. Colourful, interactive displays, such as children's paintings in the style of Monet, value their children's work and enrich the learning environment. Staff plan well for the use of the outdoor classroom. There is an extremely good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities in the older classes and staff allow plenty of time for children to think about their responses to open-ended questions. However, occasionally in the younger classes, independent learning is restricted by too much adult intervention. The setting promotes and benefits from advice and input from external agencies such as speech and occupational therapists.
- 7.6 The promotion of children's welfare is outstanding. Each child is assigned a key person with whom parents have an excellent rapport. The daily contact books enable close communication between home and school. Measures to safeguard children are robust, risk assessments are undertaken regularly in all areas of the setting and external visits, and medical procedures are carried out with care. Adults teach children important safety procedures, for example how to carry and place mats during physical education. Children's behaviour is exemplary; staff are very good role models in this respect.
- 7.7 Leadership and management are excellent. Staff have a deep understanding of the developmental stages across the EYFS for all children. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed. Staff are suitably qualified and all the required recruitment checks are carried out. Child to adult ratios are good and mean that staff know the children very well and plan for their individual needs at all times. Resources overall are effectively deployed within the setting. The strong staff team is committed to developing the quality of education for these young children further, and the self-evaluation and development plans focus well on realistic future targets. The setting has made good progress since the last inspections, especially in the use of numeracy in Bridge House and in the systems of assessment in Nursery and Reception. The responses of parents to the pre-inspection questionnaire show that they are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of their children's education, and in particular the levels of pastoral care. Parents who spoke with inspectors confirmed that "the school gets the best out of each child" and "children are all treated as individuals."

What the Setting Should Do to Improve

- 7.8 To improve still further the high quality of its provision, the setting should:
1. provide technology resources for the children in the under-3 classes and extend their opportunities for independent learning.
- 7.9 The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Childcare Act 2006.

Complaints Since the Last Inspection

- 7.10 Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required any action to meet national requirements.