



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

DUNHURST - BEDALES JUNIOR SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

FINAL VISIT

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Dunhurst - Bedales Junior School

Full Name of School	Dunhurst - Bedales Junior School			
DCSF Number	850/6007			
Registered Charity Number	307332			
Address	Dunhurst - Bedales Junior School Alton Road Steep Petersfield Hampshire GU32 2LR			
Telephone Number	01730 300200			
Fax Number	01730 300600			
Email Address	fharris@bedales.org.uk			
Headmistress	Ms Penny Watkins			
Chairman of Governors	Mr Alan Redpath			
Age Range	8 to 13			
Total Number of Pupils	197			
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (86 boys; 111 girls)			
Numbers by Age	0-3 (EYFS):	0	8-11:	87
	3-5 (EYFS):	0	11-13:	110
Number of Day Pupils	145		Capacity for flexi-boarding:	60
Number of Boarders	Total:	52		
	Full:	2	Weekly:	50
Inspection date	2 Feb 2010 to 3 Feb 2010			
Final (team) visit	1 Mar 2010 to 3 Mar 2010			

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. It consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in February 2004.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
- (b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
- (c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) The premises and accommodation
- (g) The provision of information
- (h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

The inspection of boarding was not carried out in conjunction with the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. 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 refers to an inspection in October 2004 and 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. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Dunhurst is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils between the ages of eight and thirteen years. It is the middle school of the three Bedales schools and shares the same governing body; one member of the board is appointed as its particular representative. A preparatory school, it was established just over one hundred years ago, and in 1905 it moved to its present country location on the eastern edge of the Bedales estate. It shares a dining room with the pre-preparatory school, Dunannie, and many facilities, including the swimming pool and theatre, with the senior school. It also shares the philosophy of John Badley, the founder of Bedales, that the individual child should be at the heart of education. The present headmistress has been in post since 2004. In the years since the previous inspection, closer links between the three schools have been established and the demand for flexible boarding has increased substantially.
- 1.2 The school's ethos is intrinsic to its aims. It seeks to develop inquisitive thinkers with a love of learning who cherish independent thought, and whose talents are developed through doing and making. It aims to foster individuality and encourage initiative, creativity and the appreciation of the beautiful, together with a pride in the distinctiveness of a community within which pupils and staff are valued and nurtured. It also seeks to foster interest beyond the school, through engaging with the local community and developing an international awareness.
- 1.3 There are 197 pupils in the school: 87 are in Years 4 to 6 and 110 are in Years 7 and 8; 145 are day pupils and 52 are boarders; special family weekend arrangements are made for the small number of full boarders. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs and two have English as an additional language, although none requires specialist support for English. Seventy-seven pupils have specialist learning support lessons from the school, although a high proportion have relatively minor individual needs. While the majority of pupils are British, a small minority of other cultures is represented. The school has its own careful selection procedure at each stage to ensure that all pupils may benefit fully from the education offered, with its emphasis on creativity and independence of thought. The ability range of the pupils is wide but the ability profile of pupils is above the national average. Virtually all pupils transfer to Bedales senior school at the end of Year 8.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following table.

School	NC name
Group 1	Year 4
Group 2	Year 5
Group 3	Year 6
Block 1	Year 7
Block 2	Year 8

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL AND ACTION POINTS

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 Pupils of all abilities and needs are successfully educated in a stimulating and exciting environment where individual talents are discovered and encouraged. Academically, good progress is made over time in relation to ability. In creative subjects, excellent standards are achieved and rapid progress is made; initiative, creativity and appreciation of the beautiful are highly successfully fostered. The wide-ranging curriculum and excellent programme of extra-curricular activities ensure that pupils receive a thorough grounding of knowledge, understanding and skills; they are confident and articulate and reach high standards in speaking and listening, but their skills in reading and writing and application of mathematics are less well developed. The school fully meets its aims to nurture enquiring and independent thinkers with a love of learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning and, in creative subjects in particular, they are involved, attentive and responsive to an outstanding degree. For the most part, enthusiastic and effective teaching encourages and challenges enquiring minds and contributes to the academic progress and success of the pupils. Learning support is of excellent quality, and exceptional ability in all areas is recognised and fostered.
- 2.2 Pupils' personal qualities are developed outstandingly well. Pupils are valued and nurtured by the community and, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, they develop a unique sense of caring and of social and moral responsibility, and thoughtfulness about others, together with an awareness of the beauty and creativity in nature, music and the arts which surround them. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is very highly developed. This awareness extends well beyond the school to involvement not only with the local community but also internationally, with very committed fund-raising for children's education overseas. The school community provides outstanding pastoral care, support and guidance for boarders and day pupils alike, and arrangements for welfare, health and safety are of the highest standard.
- 2.3 The governing body is very effective and totally supportive of the ethos of the school; governors have careful oversight and attend to their responsibilities extremely efficiently. Leadership and management are excellent. Through a constant and determined drive towards improvement, the development of people and systems, commitment to the value of creativity in enhancing the learning process and entrusting pupils with both freedom and responsibility, the school has progressed very successfully since the previous inspection and has succeeded in securing the support of the parent body. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive; they appreciate that academic standards are rising, achievements in creative studies are inspirational, and their children, day and boarding, love coming to school.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003, as subsequently amended.

(ii) Recommended action

2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

1. continue with the drive towards the further raising of academic standards;
2. build on existing initiatives to develop further strategies to monitor and enhance the quality of teaching and learning;
3. balance learning support between one-to-one and in-class provision.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

- 3.1 Standards are high when compared with the average for maintained primary schools. Although there are variations in ability levels in and between year groups, the ability profile is above the national average. A range of nationally standardised tests in reading, spelling, writing and mathematics, and verbal and non-verbal reasoning is used by the school and results confirm the good levels of achievement observed in the scrutiny of work in the school. In external music and drama examinations, excellent results are achieved, with high percentages gaining merits and distinctions.
- 3.2 Pupils are successfully educated in complete accordance with and fulfilment of the school's aims. They enjoy a rich education, in the true and wider sense of the word; in relation to their ability, they make good progress over time academically and achieve outstanding standards for their age in creative subjects. Pupils receive a thorough grounding of knowledge, understanding and skills in their curricular and extra-curricular activities. Good progress is made over time in reading, writing and the application of mathematics. By Year 6, pupils over a broad ability range give lucid and articulate explanations of essays they have written, and pupils in Years 6 to 8 show understanding of the areas they have covered in mathematics and build confidently on existing knowledge. Speaking, listening and creative skills are very effectively developed, as is the ability of pupils to think logically and independently, make use of their information and communication technology (ICT) skills and work individually or co-operatively. Pupils enjoy being challenged and make good progress because they are prepared not only to think for themselves but also to work co-operatively to solve problems as new concepts are introduced.
- 3.3 A vibrant programme of events includes excellent vocal and instrumental ensemble music, larger-scale concerts, and drama and dance productions ranging from Greek tragedy to musical comedy. In some productions, pupils have the responsibility for the direction, music and costumes. All this, together with a range of sports activities, provides pupils with ample opportunity to achieve and enjoy considerable success in a variety of competitive and non-competitive forums.
- 3.4 In non-competitive areas, numerous opportunities, such as participation in school assemblies, various committees in Year 8, the school council, outdoor work, community work, the creative arts and working with artists and writers in residence, all offer individual pupils exciting, stimulating and thought-provoking experiences, and contribute to excellent achievements.
- 3.5 The behaviour and attitudes to learning of the vast majority of pupils are exemplary. Fundamental to the school is the mutual respect between staff and pupils; this gives pupils every opportunity to learn and achieve successfully. They respond positively to the high expectations of their teachers. There is an air of purpose and determination to do their best, whether they are producing humorous assemblages in art or revising algebra in mathematics. They settle willingly, listen attentively and work with maturity both independently and collaboratively. They enjoy tasks which offer interest and challenge, and wish to achieve well, as was evident in discussions with them about their work.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to the pupils)

- 3.6 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision, the latter including community links of benefit to the pupils, is excellent. The extensive curriculum is highly effective. It is enhanced by an outstandingly successful creative studies programme, and continual encouragement of independence and freedom to experiment and take responsibility. The curriculum supports the aims of the school entirely; it gives pupils a love of learning, the gift of independent thought and the joy of creativity. A Year 6 cross-curricular art project, based on research of Indian hand-painting patterns, produced exquisite work, with some pupils using gold paint and others mixing their colours with Indian spices. Pupils thrive on the excitement and exhilaration of their educational experience and expressed themselves succinctly with the comment: "this is the place to be".
- 3.7 Overall, the curriculum is excellent and entirely suitable for the ages, abilities and needs of pupils in the school. It is well planned to provide progressively more challenging work and enable pupils to reach above average standards. It offers ample opportunities for drama and music, including timetabled vocal and instrumental ensemble periods in Years 7 and 8. Pupils from Year 4 upwards have a weekly double period of outdoor work, where they successfully learn to dig ditches, make fences, sow seeds and nurture the plants, create ponds and participate in conservation projects. The creative studies programme, which includes art, pottery, textiles, and design and technology, is outstanding in its contribution to the curriculum. Staff have an enthusiasm and passion for their subjects, which they transmit to their pupils, thereby not only raising the confidence and achievement of each individual, but also developing the "whole child".
- 3.8 In mathematics and modern languages in particular, classes are arranged according to ability, in order to give the best learning opportunities to all pupils. Extension work is planned in several subjects for the more able pupils. Pupils make excellent use of the library with its ICT facilities; during the school day a member of staff is always on duty to help as required in study periods and check homework diaries. Gifted and talented pupils are also identified in each subject area and staff are alerted to their needs, and extension work, both within the curriculum and in extra-curricular activity, is carefully planned to enhance their achievement.
- 3.9 The curriculum is supplemented by a well-integrated and worthwhile array of visits, visitors, extra-curricular and community activities, all of which pupils appreciate and enjoy. In keeping with the aim to foster interest beyond the school, through engaging with the local community and developing an international awareness, Year 7 and Year 8 pupils have recently returned from a highly successful art and modern languages trip to Granada and Seville. As part of their community service, older pupils support a nearby school for children with learning difficulties; this enhances their sensitivity and awareness. These opportunities broaden horizons and make an important contribution to pupils' personal and social development and education.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.10 The quality of teaching is good overall, with some outstanding features. The understanding and patient teaching makes a significant contribution to the academic progress of pupils and the success of the school; it encourages interest, application, effort and good behaviour. This effectively promotes pupils' progress and supports the aims of the school, particularly in the encouragement it gives to enquiring minds and the way in which it instils a true love of learning. The less successful teaching has little sparkle; it is competent but not inspiring, while the most successful teaching is energetic, enthusiastic and challenging.
- 3.11 In replies to their pre-inspection questionnaires, an extremely high proportion of parents considered that the teaching helped their children to make progress; their children agreed with them and were unanimous that the teaching helped them to learn; an unusually high number said they found the work interesting.
- 3.12 Pupils benefit from a generous range of resources indoors and outdoors, ample computers of which excellent use is made, a vibrant, well-stocked library and, in every classroom, interactive whiteboards. Where these were used in lessons, pupils' interest was captured and there was positive interaction.
- 3.13 Staff are well qualified, with good subject knowledge, and have an enthusiasm for their subjects which drives pupils' interests. The use of a variety of teaching methods, and the freedom to be innovative, enhance pupils' learning and achievement. In mathematics, a computer program of 'mathematical athletics' is used in a supportive role; pupils think it is competitive and fun, and it encourages consolidation of skills and progression.
- 3.14 The standard of marking varies, but the recent introduction of comments and target-setting in marked work now gives a helpful indication of either the areas on which the pupil should concentrate, or how the pupil's presentation could be improved.
- 3.15 Regular staff meetings, during which each pupil is considered, enable individual progress to be monitored. Computerised half-termly pupil reviews, formulated by class and subject teachers, then form the basis of action plans. These reviews are sent to parents. Methods of assessment are carefully considered on an ongoing basis in order that best advantage is taken of developments which will assist pupils, teachers and parents; across the school, assessment is thorough and regular.
- 3.16 The provision for pupils who require learning support on a one-to-one basis is excellent. The dedicated support unit has well-qualified and experienced staff who have valuable contacts with specialists and consultants when this might be necessary. The head of the unit has a well-established and successful system of referral. Very thorough individual education plans are written and updated each term in conjunction with the class teacher and individual pupils, who have their own versions of targets. The learning support unit works closely with class teachers, parents and their children, but in general does not offer additional in-class support. At times, the behaviour of pupils who have difficulty with concentration affects the teaching and learning experience for the majority in the class.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The development of pupils' personal qualities is outstanding; the school is highly successful in achieving its aims. Pupils have excellent opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural values. Within a caring and nurturing ethos, pupils develop a sense of caring about others, of responsibility and independence, together with an awareness of beauty in nature, art and music.
- 4.2 Pupils clearly develop an inner sensitivity and spirituality. The school is non-denominational and pupils are interested in learning about different religions through music, art and the humanities. They are encouraged to come to their own conclusions, in line with the ethos of the school. The emphasis on creativity and the arts within the school gives pupils an awareness of the beauty in nature which surrounds them, together with a mature and very real appreciation of culture, literature, art and music.
- 4.3 Pupils develop a keen sense of morality. Although they appear to have a great deal of freedom which is part of the philosophy of the school, they learn that with this freedom comes the responsibility to use it wisely. They come to appreciate the difference between right and wrong. A group of Year 8 pupils was keen to point out that, in fact, there is constant supervision. In conversation, pupils have a sense of fairness and concern for others. They appreciate the value of their environment, and the active steps they must take to care for it. The whole-school commitment to Jeremy Gilley's organised global day for peace illustrates how the school raises pupils' awareness of genuine moral debate.
- 4.4 Pupils are encouraged to become independent and act responsibly and respectfully from an early age. In each subject, they are set weekly preps or homework which they complete in the library during the study periods that are built into their class timetable. They have to manage these periods themselves and also arrange their music lessons and practices, and any other individual lessons during these times. New pupils and their parents are carefully introduced to this structure, where pupils should rarely need to take homework home after their long school day.
- 4.5 Pupils develop an excellent social awareness. Personal, social and health education sessions contribute effectively to this, as does the work shadowing scheme for Year 8. Older pupils take responsibility for the younger ones, for example through the 'peer-listener' scheme. Hence, they not only act as role models but develop a thoughtful and sensitive attitude themselves. Pupils are consistently treated with respect by adults and are helped to realise that their community is built on mutual respect. The practice of calling teachers by their first name becomes perfectly natural and emphasises that adults "are seen as human beings" in accordance with the wishes of the founder. Hence, pupils are confident, friendly and well behaved.
- 4.6 Cultural awareness is strongly developed, partly through the creative studies curriculum and through cross-curricular topics, such as the present Year 6 project that is covering all aspects of India, and has included an Indian dance workshop. The many links with the outside world include those with a school in Nicaragua desperately in need of new classrooms; a pupil gave a presentation to the whole school about a fund-raising project, based on recycling printer cartridges and mobile telephones, which he has independently researched and organised.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care, welfare, health and safety

- 4.7 The school provides outstanding pastoral care, and arrangements for welfare, health and safety are of the highest standard. The teaching staff and, indeed, all the adults in the community, including the school counsellor, provide extremely effective support and guidance for the pupils in complete accordance with the school's aim that they should feel valued and nurtured by the community and thereby enabled to succeed. A significant strength of the school is the mutual respect between staff and pupils, and among the pupils themselves. This is part of the culture of the school, where pupils are given the trust and freedom to grow up in a caring, supportive and encouraging atmosphere in which they learn by example. This is illustrated by comments from pupils such as: "There's a very open atmosphere. You can talk to anybody so everyone knows what's going on. If there were any bullying it would soon be found out and dealt with. We would not wish to be anywhere else." Parents too, in their comments and conversation, emphasised how skilfully the school responds to any issues of unkindness. A significantly high proportion of parents was pleased with the school's pastoral care and guidance.
- 4.8 Great care is taken over transition, with effective liaison between the three Bedales schools, bringing much benefit to the pupils. A computerised recording system is common to all the schools so that communication about pupils is seamless from one section of the establishment to the next. The safeguarding policy and related appointments procedure contain all the necessary requirements and are implemented very successfully. Systems and checks are extremely thorough, as are training and relationships with external agencies.
- 4.9 All necessary measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. Risk assessments throughout indicate great care and thoughtfulness for the pupils. The school has a well-considered plan to improve educational access for pupils with disabilities, and the care currently offered to members of the community is outstandingly well planned and successful. The design and technology accommodation was redesigned in response to the previous inspection and no longer presents the risks previously identified - it has been thoroughly checked for health and safety risks.
- 4.10 Overall, arrangements to ensure health and safety are carefully balanced and highly effective; they include excellent provision for pupils who are ill or require medication. Pupils are encouraged to be fit and healthy through developing sensible eating habits and taking regular exercise. Meal-times are pleasant, social occasions and the food served in the attractive dining room is healthy and nutritious; pupils help themselves from an appetising selection that is plentiful and varied, of excellent quality, and much appreciated by them and by staff. Physical education and games have an important place in the curriculum; and a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities and extensive outside play areas encourage pupils to be active.

4.(c) The quality of boarding education

- 4.11 The boarding experience plays an extremely valuable part in the pupils' education and development, and makes an important contribution to the fulfilment of the school's aims, particularly in encouraging individual independence and social interdependence. All boarders have made the positive decision themselves that they wish to board; they enjoy and benefit from the experience.
- 4.12 Social relationships in the two boarding wings, one for girls and one for boys, are friendly and relaxed. Pupils relate well to adults and to each other. Boarders are extremely well looked after by houseparents and their assistants, including matrons and Gap Year students. Their health is well promoted too and they enjoy their breakfasts and suppers, in addition to their lunches. Pupils explained: "Boarding is good because you are always with your friends and you never get bored. The house staff are amazing – like a family."
- 4.13 A wide range of activities takes place in the evenings. These are well attended by boarders and by day pupils, many of whom stay on overnight after a special activity. Pupils have well-lit areas for outside games in winter and more extensive play areas in summer. House staff are very active in organising enjoyable evening activities and special events, particularly on Friday evenings.
- 4.14 The accommodation is spacious, with plenty of storage space. It is pleasantly furnished, and the sick rooms are cosy and restful. There are games rooms and comfortable common rooms for relaxation and watching television. The recently opened boarders' café, where they can make toast and hot drinks for themselves in the evenings, is a much appreciated innovation. Recommendations from the previous boarding inspection by Ofsted have been fully attended to.
- 4.15 Although full boarding has declined in recent years, flexible arrangements have increased in popularity and boarding is still regarded as central to the life and ethos of the school. Importantly, the pupils themselves consider it a most worthwhile and enjoyable experience.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The school benefits from extremely supportive and effective governance. The governors firmly believe in the special ethos of the school and its vision for the future. They are in full agreement with its aims and proud of its success in upholding the philosophy of its founder. Members of the governing body, which also serves the senior school and the pre-preparatory school, are carefully selected from relevant professions; effective arrangements are made for their selection, induction and training.
- 5.2 The governing body provides most effective oversight of the school and its members discharge their duties extremely efficiently. They take expert advice when necessary and their financial planning is careful and thorough, as is their development planning. They understand the need for careful investment in staff, accommodation and resources, and have financed considerable improvements in these areas in Dunhurst over recent years, with further refurbishment in present planning in order to enhance further the educational and boarding environment.
- 5.3 Through the appointment of a designated governor to the preparatory school, termly reports from the headmistress and heads of departments, and close liaison between the headmistress, the link governor, the staff representative governor and the chairman, the governing body has a good insight into the working of the school. Its members are aware of their responsibility to provide support and stimulus for growth and improvement. Governors also take their responsibility for raising educational standards extremely seriously and they fully support the school's initiatives in this area. Their education committee meets termly and is updated on school policies, appraisals, requirements and successes.
- 5.4 The governors are also aware of and particularly effective in discharging their responsibilities for safe recruiting, child protection, welfare, health and safety throughout the school, through the excellent contribution of the bursar and his department. Together, they have ensured that the recommendations of the last reports have been successfully attended to. Through the combined efforts of the headmistress and the parents' association, who have an excellent relationship with the governors, the faith of parents in the governing body has been strengthened

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.5 The leadership and management of the school are excellent, and their philosophy is completely in harmony with the aims of the school. The school is fortunate in that it benefits greatly from supportive, encouraging and wise leadership and management, totally committed to the fulfilment of its aims and ethos, which place great importance on the education of each child as an individual in a happy, nurturing environment. The school has developed very successfully since the previous inspection and is exceptionally well led, with tireless drive and commitment to the highest possible standards shown by the headmistress and those in management positions. A significant strength is the evident pride and loyalty of staff, parents and pupils.
- 5.6 Clear educational direction and a firm underlying structure are undoubtedly provided by the leadership and management, and increasing emphasis is being placed on the quality of pupils' academic education in order that every advantage is taken of the evident joy in learning of the vast majority of pupils and that their academic achievement matches the high standard of their personal development. The school's programme for raising academic standards continues in the senior school.
- 5.7 Leadership and management are highly effective in their approach to self-evaluation; the comprehensive appraisal system enables them to be perceptive in the setting of priorities for school development and they are determined to ensure that these are achieved. They have demonstrated patience, determination and faith since the previous inspection and have made significant progress in successfully meeting the aims of the school. Pupils respond maturely to the encouragement they are given to think independently, take initiatives and be creative.
- 5.8 Senior management is successful in appointing staff of high quality and is proactive in providing support, development opportunities and motivation for them. All new staff benefit from careful induction arrangements. In line with the aims of the school, staff are valued; outstanding concern and care are shown for their well-being. A senior member of staff is responsible for staff welfare. Staff, particularly boarding staff, are very well trained for their roles in safeguarding, welfare, health and safety. The school has rigorous arrangements for checking the suitability of staff, supply staff and governors.
- 5.9 An excellent, extremely thorough appraisal system is linked to school improvement. Heads of department review members of their department and discuss their self-assessments, and identify objectives for school improvement, professional development and personal fulfilment. The headmistress reviews heads of department and simultaneously reviews departmental priorities and objectives, thereby identifying school development and budgetary issues. Generous funding for appropriate continued professional development is made available, to the advantage of both staff and pupils.

5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.10 The school maintains an excellent relationship with parents; it recognises and amply fulfils its commitment to those who have chosen this school, with its unique ethos, for their children.
- 5.11 Parents indicated overwhelmingly in reply to their questionnaire their happiness with the education and support provided for their children, and with the quality of communication with the school. Regular colourful newsletters keep them up to date, in addition to a weekly bulletin from the headmistress; the website is attractive and informative and is regularly updated.
- 5.12 Day parents have good opportunities to be actively involved in the work and progress of their children. Parents of boarders from more distant homes may not have the opportunity to be greatly involved but parents of those who board on a flexible basis who are relatively near the school are a very welcome part of the community. Parents of pupils and of prospective pupils are provided with the required information about the school; the former receive clear and useful reports twice a year, and a pupil review once a term about their children's work and progress.
- 5.13 Parents appreciate the welcoming, active parents' groups and the support available from class and boarding representatives. The two associations, Friends of Dunhurst and the Bedales Parents' Association, have just combined to present the school with the generous gift of a marimba which can be used either indoors or wheeled outdoors to make music in the open air. Staff and pupils gave an impromptu performance at an assembly to the delight of the considerable number of parents who had come to watch the presentation of the gift. The mothers who chair the parents' groups meet weekly with the headmistress, and the parents' community contributes to the school development plan. The addition of the outdoor classroom was funded by parents.
- 5.14 The school handles any concerns of parents with thoughtfulness and understanding. Not only is there an open-door policy, but parents have a 24-hour mobile number for the headmistress. Therefore, prompt attention to any concern is assured.
- 5.15 Parents' comments in the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school, with its 'inspirational' headmistress and deputy head. Parents were delighted with the "superb" boarding, with its happy, friendly atmosphere, the pastoral care overall and the regular programme of lectures or 'child talks' for parents about relevant topics such as nutrition, cyber bullying, relationships and transfer to senior school. A small number of critical comments referred to an element of disruptive behaviour, provision for gifted and talented pupils and lack of information about progress. The inspection team considered that the school was well aware of the first two areas and taking appropriate action, while the termly pupil reviews gave a regular update on progress. Pupils themselves said that they feel safe, cared for, listened to and respected.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the boarding areas and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Danice Iles

Mr Gordon Ferguson

Mr James Macpherson

Mrs Krystyna Derkacz

Reporting Inspector

Team Inspector (Deputy Headmaster, IAPS)

Team Inspector (Former Headmaster, IAPS)

Team Inspector (Co-ordinator, IAPS)