



**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**DOWNSIDE SCHOOL**

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Downside School

Full Name of School	<b>Downside School</b>
DfE Number	<b>933/6021</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>232548</b>
Address	<b>Downside School Stratton-on-the-Fosse Radstock Somerset BA3 4RJ</b>
Telephone Number	<b>01761 235100</b>
Fax Number	<b>01761 235105</b>
Email Address	<b>hmsec@downside.co.uk</b>
Head	<b>Fr Leo Maidlow Davis</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Abbot Aidan Bellenger</b>
Age Range	<b>11 to 18</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>369</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (229 boys; 140 girls)</b>
Numbers by Age	<b>0-2 (EYFS): 0      5-11: 0 3-5 (EYFS): 0      11-18: 369</b>
Number of Day Pupils	<b>Total: 26</b>
Number of Boarders	<b>Total: 343 Full: 330      Weekly: 13</b>
Inspection dates	<b>20 Nov 2012 to 23 Nov 2012</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in November 2010, with follow-up inspections in July 2011 and November 2011.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State 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 2010. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed on the website [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). Additionally, inspections will consider the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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

This inspection contains 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, personal development and welfare. Until September 2011, Boarding inspections were carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where Achievement is 'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade.** Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. **For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.**

## 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 chair of governors and other governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and house assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses 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

Mr Ian Newton	Reporting Inspector
Mr Andrew Chicken	Team Inspector (Headmaster, HMC School)
Miss Vivienne Davis	Team Inspector (Former Headmistress, GSA School)
Mr David Dawswell	Team Inspector (Second Master, HMC School)
Mr Stephen Jefferson	Team Inspector (Former Head of Department, HMC School)
Mr John Parsonage	Team Inspector (Former Head of Department, HMC School)
Mr Daniel Phillips	Team Inspector (Head of Department, HMC School)
Mr Matthew March	Co-ordinating Inspector for Boarding
Mrs Karen MacGregor	Team Inspector for Boarding (Assistant Head, HMC School)
Mrs Linda Smallwood	Team Inspector for Boarding (Former Deputy Head, GSA School)

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

- 1.1 Downside School was founded in Douai, France, in 1606 by the Benedictine community of St Gregory the Great. In the late eighteenth century, the Abbey and school moved from revolutionary France to England; it has been on its present site in Stratton-on-the-Fosse south of Bath since 1814. The school provides mainly boarding education for boys and girls from the age of eleven to the age of eighteen.
- 1.2 The school is attached to the adjoining Benedictine monastery, of which the headmaster is a member. The trustees are all monks appointed either by the abbot or by the community. They act as the school proprietors, but they have appointed a governing body to act as their agents in the oversight of the school. The governing body is comprised mainly of professional lay people, with some trustees. Both the trustees and governing body are chaired by the abbot. However, at the time of the inspection, governance was under review. The proposals for the new instrument of governance, the principles of which have been approved by the trustees since the inspection, are designed to ensure greater separation between community and school. They include a change in proprietorial responsibility from trustees to the governing body and the possibility of both a lay chair and head.
- 1.3 A full inspection of the school took place in November 2010, in conjunction with an Ofsted inspection of boarding. Follow-up visits took place by both organisations in July 2011 and November 2011. Since the original inspection, the school has reviewed its safeguarding arrangements, its management structure and its development planning process.
- 1.4 The school provides a Catholic education for its pupils, guided by the Rule of St Benedict. It aims to educate each pupil so that they should achieve the highest academic and personal standards and develop all their gifts to become more fruitfully committed to Christ, his Church and the service of others.
- 1.5 At the time of the inspection, there were 369 pupils on roll, 229 boys and 140 girls. Twenty-six of these were day pupils. Pupils are accommodated in a mixed junior house in Years 7 and 8; a house for boys in Year 9; three houses for boys in Years 10 to 13; and two houses for girls in Years 9 to 13. Day pupils are all allocated to boarding houses, through which they receive their pastoral care.
- 1.6 Pupils are drawn mainly, but not exclusively, from Catholic families in the south of England with some from further afield. Most are of white British ethnicity, with a broad mix of other cultures and ethnicities. The ability profile of the school is above the national average, with most pupils having an ability that is at least above average, and few of below average ability. Sixty-four pupils have English as an additional language (EAL) of whom twenty require support. Fifty-five pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom twenty-three receive specialist support. None have statements of educational need.

- 1.7 National Curriculum (NC) 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 equivalence are shown in the following table. In the interest of brevity, housemasters and housemistresses are referred to as housestaff in the report.

School	NC name
First Form	Year 7
Second Form	Year 8
Third Form	Year 9
Fourth Form	Year 10
Fifth Form	Year 11
Lower Sixth Form	Year 12
Upper Sixth Form	Year 13

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 Pupils are extremely well educated throughout the school, achieving public examination results which are, at A level, better than those in maintained selective schools. They develop into excellent students. They have first-class literacy and mathematical skills, and are successful in a range of academic, sporting and creative activities. In class they are enthusiastic and work hard, supporting each other's learning and playing a full part in discussion. Good progress throughout the school is supported by excellent arrangements for both curricular and co-curricular activities. Arrangements of equal quality support pupils with SEND and EAL. Teaching, which is excellent overall, supports the progress of pupils of differing abilities and needs well. Much teaching gives pupils excellent opportunities to work together; lessons are well planned and carefully structured with a varied range of activities. Well-targeted questions develop the pupils' understanding. A small proportion of teaching uses too narrow a range of strategies, which limits the progress made. Marking is generally good, but a small proportion lacks clear guidance.
- 2.2 The pupils' excellent personal development draws clearly on the school's Benedictine ethos, strong sense of community and excellent pastoral care. Pupils appreciate the school's monastic context, respect each other's views and seek to meet the needs of others. They are courteous and friendly, at ease with each other, and almost always behave well. Relationships, both amongst pupils and between pupils and staff, are strong and supportive. In the questionnaires, many pupils felt that opportunities for responsibility were too few, that the school did not listen to their views and that staff were not always fair; however, inspection evidence including discussions with pupils did not support this. The arrangements for safeguarding, welfare and matters of health and safety make an excellent contribution to pupils' development; they are improved since previous inspections. Provision for boarding is good. The boarders' excellent personal development is reflected in the strength of community, the way that pupils usually treat each other and the close relationships within the houses. Pupils are well cared for in almost all respects, though the standard of accommodation varies. Boarding is well led and managed.
- 2.3 Good governance enables the school to identify key priorities and effective ways of working towards them, so that it achieves the highest academic and personal standards. This quality of governance, characterised by a sense of commitment and urgency, alongside good leadership and management, have contributed to the improvements which have taken place in safeguarding; the school now meets all the requirements made in previous reports about staff recruitment, safeguarding and child protection, confirming the position in the most recent visits by ISI and Ofsted in November 2011. Staff and monks receive appropriate training in child protection, welfare and health and safety. Similarly, improvements in standards are being energetically pursued and systems for monitoring progress and quality are robust. The recommendations in the previous report about improving development planning and the consistency of teaching have been met. However, despite a good measure of consultation not all staff have felt fully engaged in the process, and appraisal is underdeveloped. The school enjoys good relationships with its parents as shown in the highly positive replies to the overwhelming majority of questionnaires. Concerns from a minority about the school's response when parents raised issues were not borne out in the sample of correspondence scrutinised.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

- 2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.
- 2.5 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011.

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Extend the arrangements for identifying and supporting the individual professional development needs of the staff at all levels.
  2. Ensure that the quality of all teaching and marking reflects the high quality of the great majority.
  3. Develop strategies for improving the environment within some houses.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning**

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievement and learning is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils are extremely well educated both inside and outside the classroom, in accordance with the school's aim that they should achieve the highest academic standards. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, the great majority of pupils and parents said how pleased they were with the progress that pupils make.
- 3.3 From the time they join the school, pupils show an excellent appreciation of language and literature, for example analysing literary techniques in poetry, and understanding the relationship between character and plot. An excellent grasp of grammar enables them to analyse mistakes and improve their work in modern languages. They have a strong understanding of mathematical concepts, apply experimental techniques to new situations in science and have a firm grasp of historical and geographical ideas. Their strong creative ability is typified by excellent sight-reading in music, and their physical skills by well-thought-out sequences in physical education. Pupils use information and communications technology (ICT) well, showing good data handling skills in science, photographic interpretation skills in geography, and creative skills in design and technology; for example, a skilful presentation was given in biology. Sixth form pupils, in particular, write well-argued essays showing logical thought and a sense of structure, show an excellent understanding of advanced mathematical techniques and demonstrate considerable accuracy in modern languages. They present ideas logically, articulately and cogently in an academic society, presenting their arguments confidently. Pupils have gained excellent results in the Extended Project Qualification.
- 3.4 Individual pupils are successful in a range of academic, sporting and creative activities, as are school teams and groups. Pupils gain a wide range of skills and experiences through the cadet force and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE). Some pupils play bridge at national level. A high quality St Cecilia's Day organ recital was given by pupils during the inspection. A high proportion of pupils gain places at universities, many of which are highly selective.
- 3.5 The following analysis uses data from 2009 to 2011, the most recent three years for which comparative data is available. GCSE results are well above the national average for maintained schools, and similar to the national average for maintained selective schools. In 2011, three-fifths of results were at A\* or A grade. Results in IGCSE subjects were generally higher than worldwide norms. A-Level results were well above the national average for maintained schools, and above the national average for maintained selective schools. In 2011, half the results were at A\* or A grade and three-quarters are A\* to B grade, higher than the selective school average. These results, combined with inspection evidence, show that pupils make good progress as they move through the school, compared with the average for pupils of similar ability.
- 3.6 Excellent support enables pupils with EAL or SEND to progress well, with EAL pupils developing a secure understanding of how to apply grammatical rules, and less able pupils grasping quantitative concepts well. These pupils persevere with difficult issues, take time to think through and articulate their responses well. Pupils who are specially gifted also progress well. For example, pupils learned about double angle formulae in a challenging further mathematics lesson, and lively discussion in

English enabled other pupils to make rapid progress in understanding the relationship between nature and the creator as expressed in the poetry of Gerald Manley Hopkins. Worksheets which include additional challenge enable able pupils to make additional progress in modern languages.

- 3.7 Pupils are excellent learners. They are enthusiastic, well motivated and mostly fully engaged. They show focus and perseverance and are prepared to make mistakes and learn from them. They are mature, confident and articulate, speaking cogently when presenting arguments. They think critically about their work, for example evaluating it with a classmate. Pupils relish a challenge, being prepared to work individually but also asking pertinent questions when they need to seek help. In a few lessons pupils were passive when opportunities for individual or collaborative work offered limited opportunity for them to extend their learning fully. Pupils designing a stretcher for use in wild country sought advice from the army. Pupils work extremely well together, sharing ideas and helping each other, both in developing ideas and in practical work. They play a very full part in question and answer exchanges. Their written work is almost always well presented and well organised.

### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision**

- 3.8 The contribution of curricular and co-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.9 This supports the aim of encouraging pupils to develop their potential both inside and outside the classroom, as well as in the community. Both pupils and parents were extremely positive about the choice of subjects and activities provided. The recent changes to the day provide a longer lunchtime for recreation and reflection, as well as more double periods, which enable greater variety in teaching approaches.
- 3.10 The excellent curriculum is broad and balanced, giving pupils linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, aesthetic and creative, and physical experience; it is well suited to all ages, abilities and needs. In Years 7 to 9, pupils study a wide range of subjects, including compulsory Latin and the creative subjects, with the sciences taught separately. In Year 9, linguistic ability is further developed through a choice of Spanish, German or Greek.
- 3.11 At GCSE, pupils usually choose ten subjects from a wide choice; almost all pupils can pursue their preferred combination. As part of the focus on Benedictine life, all pupils study a full course in religious studies. Most study a modern foreign language. Additional courses in art and design reflect increasing interest in aesthetic and creative subjects.
- 3.12 The sixth form offers a comprehensive choice of 23 A-level subjects, including both Latin and Greek as well as history of art, photography, psychology and both economics and business studies. In addition to optional A-level religious studies, there is a compulsory, non-examined general religious studies course to help pupils prepare for life beyond school. Pupils receive comprehensive guidance in choosing A-level subjects and universities, supported by psychometric aptitude tests and personal advice. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, receiving support for their choice of career.
- 3.13 The PSHE programme successfully encourages pupils to think about themselves and their place in the world. Pupils are introduced to citizenship not only through

class discussion, but also by participation in decision-making through school and house discussion groups, and by their involvement in community action.

- 3.14 The school makes excellent provision for pupils with EAL and SEND. Careful planning ensures that EAL pupils receive extremely well targeted support, enabling them to develop good language skills and gain relevant qualifications. In addition to high quality one-to-one support, learner profiles for pupils with SEND give excellent information to enable teaching to reflect the pupils' individual needs. Liaison between departments and the special needs co-ordinator is good. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from a range of opportunities. Individual teachers are expected to plan additional challenge from day to day. Activities such as the Model United Nations and the Knowles academic society allow pupils to develop high standards of reasoning and debate out of class. About 20 pupils each year take the Extended Project Qualification, which gives further opportunities for high quality work.
- 3.15 Pupils are enthusiastic about the excellent programme for sport, the arts, and community service, as well as about the wide range of well-organised clubs, competitions and events. For example, a significant number develop leadership and teamwork skills through the flourishing and well-managed cadet force. In addition, many pupils take part in the DofE scheme. Popular inter-house competitions take place in sport, drama, music and debating. Music is strong, with the marching band and choirs the main focus for performance, often outside the school. A large proportion of pupils take instrumental lessons. Sport is well co-ordinated. Specialist staff coach teams with a significant benefit to the pupils' enjoyment and success.
- 3.16 Links with the community are well developed. Sixth form pupils take part in a well-organised community service programme; activities include riding for the disabled, assisting in a charity shop and helping at a local radio station.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.17 The quality of teaching is excellent overall.
- 3.18 The great majority of teaching is at least good and a substantial proportion is of the highest quality, enabling pupils to gain good examination results in respect to their abilities. This reflects the school's aim that pupils should progress well and achieve at the highest level. It demonstrates greater consistency than in the previous inspection. The criticism by a minority of pupils in the pre inspection questionnaire that teachers do not provide sufficient individual help was not borne out in conversation with pupils or other inspection evidence; in contrast pupils said they strongly appreciate the help they receive, both informally and through subject clinics.
- 3.19 Lessons are almost always carefully planned and extremely well structured, using an excellent variety of activities. The best teaching draws on considerable use of a wide range of resources, such as the library, newspapers and ICT. The library has a wide variety of books, revision materials and computing facilities, and it is well staffed so that it is an easy and attractive place to use. The great majority of teaching is delivered with considerable pace and enjoyment, so that pupils are fully engaged and behaviour is good. In all teaching, explanations are clear and based on strong subject knowledge; time is well used and good use of initial activities in lessons gets lessons off to a brisk start.
- 3.20 Much teaching provides pupils with excellent opportunities to work together and support each other. Very occasionally teaching focuses too much on the role of the

teacher or the needs of the syllabus specification, reducing opportunities for independent work by pupils.

- 3.21 Excellent use is made of question and answer to develop the pupils' understanding and monitor their progress. Questions are carefully thought-out and often targeted in a way that reflects the pupils' individual potential. Work is more consistently adapted to the pupils' individual needs than at the time of the previous inspection. Particular care is taken to create imaginative activities for those who have EAL or SEND, and individual support is effective in almost all lessons. Many lessons offer additional challenge to more able pupils, for example through the setting of more demanding tasks or involving them in more challenging discussion.
- 3.22 The overall quality of marking and assessment is good. Marking is almost always thorough and detailed, and provides constructive and informative feedback throughout the school in almost all subject areas. The best examples provide clearly focused advice, which ensures that pupils understand what they must do to achieve higher standards. In a very few cases, marking is more cursory and lacking in guidance. The school has already introduced systems such as departmental work scrutiny to monitor marking to address such inconsistency. The assessed pieces of work used for tracking are marked to set criteria and moderated, where possible, within departments.
- 3.23 Since the previous inspection, the school has introduced a comprehensive system of target grades for pupils in Years 10 to 13 based on the analysis of standardised data. Targets are set judiciously to give pupils of all abilities a greater sense of focus and progress is carefully monitored against them. Evaluation by senior management ensures suitable intervention for those falling behind their targets. In the best teaching, effective use is made of data to monitor the pupils' progress and plan future learning though this is not entirely universal.

## 4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is excellent.
- 4.2 This fulfils the school's aim of developing high personal standards in each pupil in the light of the school's Christian context. By the time they leave, their personal development is excellent.
- 4.3 The pupils' lives are imbued with a strong sense of the spiritual; pupils of all faiths and none possess an inner confidence, and a strong sense of their own identity. They are confident, articulate, thoughtful, self-aware and reflective, appreciating the breadth of opportunities the school offers and responding well to them; they are proud of all they achieve. Responses to the questionnaire and discussion with pupils showed how much they appreciate the Abbey church and the influence of the Benedictine rule. They speak with conviction about the increase of faith and stability in their lives at school, and those who attend value the practice of *Lectio Divina*, the reflective reading of scripture. Pupils of all faiths and none are respectful at house prayers. Both Catholic and non-Catholic pupils value the daily rhythm of worship through morning and evening prayer in houses, appreciating it as a time for reflection. Some pupils participate actively in the programme of spiritual development, which includes pilgrimages, confirmation, and a varied and challenging programme of retreats; older pupils become more aware of the range of human experience, for example visiting an enclosed order of Bernadine nuns and meeting reforming drug addicts. Pupils take a growing responsibility for the spiritual lives of their houses, liaising with house chaplains and arranging the rota of servers and readers with the chaplaincy prefect and head server.
- 4.4 Pupils have an extremely well-developed understanding of right and wrong; for example, in a lesson on the *Lord of the Flies* they explored the fragility of human morality in a pressurised environment in depth. They understand the importance of good behaviour, treating others with care and support. Pupils have a mature understanding of the needs of those less fortunate in society; this has been gained, for example, through challenging activities such as the Friday night soup runs in Bath. They show a strong commitment to charitable activities such as the pupil-led San Damiano society, which raises funds for the impoverished in Africa. Pupils in the DofE scheme have organised food parcels for a food bank in Bath and a junior house contributed to a similar scheme in Bristol. In discussion, pupils show an excellent understanding of ethical issues, such as the values represented by great differences in salary.
- 4.5 The pupils' social development is excellent. They are courteous and friendly, both to each other and to visitors. As a result, there is a strong sense of community and family within their houses. A significant proportion of pupils comment in questionnaires that opportunities for responsibility were limited. Inspection evidence does not support this view. Older pupils have a wide variety of opportunities to work with younger pupils in the boarding houses, as mentors and role models. They show confidence and initiative organising social and cultural events, such as play performances, discos and film nights. Older pupils are effective as prefects, taking their responsibilities seriously. Similarly pupils enjoy the opportunities to contribute to library management as a result of its imaginative leadership. The pupils' sense of community is very deep, particularly within the houses where they place strong emphasis on valuing the unique gifts of each individual in line with the teaching of St.

Benedict. Lessons in PSHE show a good understanding of citizens' rights; pupils have a growing awareness of social, political and economic issues acquired both through classroom discussion and their involvement in wider social action.

- 4.6 Pupils develop extremely well in their cultural awareness. Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities mix easily in their house communities, treating each other with mutual respect. They enjoy sharing their cultural heritage, for example through dinners hosted by Polish, French, and Chinese pupils. They benefit from a wide range of aesthetic and cultural opportunities. For example, there is wide participation in musical activity, ranging from the orchestra, pipe band and choirs to the rock band and summer jazz concert. Drama is also popular with pupils; recent performances have included *Oklahoma!*, *Peter Pan* and *Toad of Toad Hall*. Pupils appreciate opportunities to travel abroad and reflect on their moving experiences, taking part in battlefield tours and the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes. The spirit of tolerance and enquiry embraced by pupils enables them to show a strong mutual regard for those of faith or belief different from their own. This understanding is reinforced by visits to other places of worship such as mosques and temples.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care**

- 4.7 The quality of the school's arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.8 Staff with pastoral responsibilities provide excellent support and guidance for all pupils, monitoring their personal development and academic progress closely. Relationships between the staff and pupils, and amongst the pupils themselves, are excellent. These positive relationships underpin the strong community spirit within the school. Staff know and understand the pupils well. Pupils know to whom they can turn for help if they have personal difficulties. Pupils greatly value their supportive relationships with staff. Equally they enjoy house Feast Day dinners, while barbeques, paintballing, Capture the Flag, croquet and other activities which help break the ice and develop friendships in the early phases of the school year.
- 4.9 Carefully planned menus offer a balanced, nutritious diet, including a range of healthy options, to encourage pupils to eat healthily. The opportunities for physical exercise provided by the comprehensive games and co-curricular programmes also contribute significantly to the pupils' opportunities to develop healthy living.
- 4.10 The school successfully promotes high standards of conduct. The behaviour code is clear and well respected by the pupils, and any unacceptable behaviour is dealt with appropriately in accordance with the sanctions procedure. Rewards, such as merits and distinctions, encourage good behaviour and achievement effectively. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, some of the pupils indicated that sanctions and rewards are not always used fairly, but the inspection evidence found it was fair overall. The rare incidences of bullying and harassment are dealt with promptly and effectively.
- 4.11 A suitable access plan is in place for pupils with physical disabilities. The provision for pupils who require extra learning support is excellent.
- 4.12 The school attaches considerable importance to the need to be responsive to the pupils' views. Pupils take advantage of the opportunities for consultation provided by the school council, house councils and tutorial meetings. In response to the questionnaire, a number of pupils voiced criticism of the school's responsiveness to their concerns but those interviewed said they feel that the school listens to them and takes action when appropriate. For example, they spoke of the success of the

school council in helping to improve the quality of food, and confirmed that a presentation by girls to the headmaster resulted in changes to the school uniform.

#### **4.(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety**

- 4.13 The arrangements for welfare, health and safety are excellent.
- 4.14 The school's safeguarding arrangements are much improved since the November 2010 inspection and, as in the advisory visit in November 2011, policies and practice meet the requirements in full. Thorough procedures ensure the safe recruitment of staff, and all the necessary checks are carried out. The school now has a single office managing safer recruitment, both for all those living or working in the monastic community and those who live or work in the school. References, checks on previous employment and qualifications, and medical declarations are carried out before staff start work. Criminal records checks are conducted for all new appointments. Where receipt of the disclosure is delayed, the required checks of the barred list and accompanying risk assessments are conducted robustly in accordance with statutory guidance. These risk assessments are countersigned by the designated person for child protection. The full records now kept ensure that the position at the time when staff start work is recorded as well as any subsequent checks. Right to work and criminal records checks have been carried out on all governors and trustees, and criminal records checks carried out on all those who live or work in the monastery who are not trustees; these checks are now conducted and recorded in the single central register by the school. In the case of monks, the register now records both birth names and the names they adopted when they joined the community. Teaching staff and monks who have a role in the school receive training in child protection. The standards reported in November 2011 have been maintained.
- 4.15 As recommended in November 2011, the school has made further improvements since that visit. New staffing has resulted in further improvements in the central register and it now contains all the information that is recommended as well as that which is required. The records are meticulous, having been recently reorganised; those involved are entirely clear of the importance of raising any issue of concern robustly with the school's management and are confident that it will receive the proper attention. The training in child protection that was planned for monks who are not involved in the school has now been carried out and will be repeated annually and, for new members of the community, when they arrive. It has been made clear in writing to monks who live elsewhere that they cannot return to the monastery without the abbot's express permission. Appropriate procedures have been established for managing the residential status of any person who may be subject to allegations, taking advice from local agencies where appropriate
- 4.16 In addition, the school has very precise procedures to manage contact with the monastery; pupils only visit the abbey church if accompanied and this is made clear to them, for example by wide-spread use of notices to that effect. The child protection officer records any areas of concern carefully and liaises with the local authority designated officer readily. A wide variety of staff confirmed to inspectors that they have received child protection training and know with whom they should raise any concerns. A joint committee of staff, governors and members of the monastic community ensures full liaison over these issues and the termly report to the governing body is fully discussed by governors. The records are reviewed regularly both by an experienced governor and by a specially trained trustee so that both governors and trustees can exercise oversight.

- 4.17 The school has thorough arrangements for dealing with fire and other risks. A professional fire risk assessment has been carried out and action taken where urgent; however, the lack of a clear summary of the principal risks makes it more difficult to monitor progress. Regular fire drills and equipment checks are carried out. The school has secure arrangements for health and safety with highly detailed and well thought out risk assessments for activities both at school and on trips. Pupils who are ill or injured are extremely well cared for in the medical centre and an appropriate number of staff have first aid qualifications. Those who have EAL or SEND are very well supported. Admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and backed up.

#### **4.(d) The quality of boarding**

- 4.18 The quality of boarding is good.
- 4.19 This reflects the emphasis on the community and on caring for one another in the Rule of St. Benedict, which underpins all aspects of boarding life and is seen in the high standard of support boarders show to each other. Almost all boarders say they enjoy boarding, though there is criticism of some aspects. Parents were almost uniformly positive about the boarding arrangements. Inspectors agreed with these positive views.
- 4.20 Boarders have an excellent standard of personal development, integrity and tolerance. They are confident and relate well to both adults and fellow boarders, as they made clear in the questionnaires. This is particularly notable in the way that overseas boarders are seamlessly assimilated into their house communities. Boarders are at ease in their houses and their genuine warmth and affection for staff show how much they value the care they receive. Senior pupils, whether prefects or not, provide positive role models, and make a particular contribution to the houses for younger pupils. Boarders are fiercely proud of their houses, despite variations in the quality of accommodation. The structure of the school, whereby boys are accommodated together in Year 9 before progressing into their senior houses in Year 10, allows long-term relationships to develop which last throughout their senior school careers. Girls enjoy the experience of joining their senior house in Year 9. Boarders actively contribute to the wider community in a variety of ways, for instance, by collecting foodstuffs and delivering them to a charity in Bristol.
- 4.21 Boarding provision and care are good. Many pupils are accommodated in excellent accommodation. However, accommodation for older boys is more variable in quality; in particular, some houses, although adequate in terms of living, sleeping and bathroom space, are in need of updating. Pupils are very well known by housestaff, who are active and approachable, enabling them to meet pupils' individual needs well. Medical care is excellent and the health centre is always staffed. Boarders take plenty of exercise, with games timetabled for all age groups. Pupils are also expected to participate in an extensive range of activities during the week. The busy and varied weekend programme they are offered ranges from formal house dinners to dry-slope skiing and paintballing, and thus provides both entertainment and opportunities for responsibility; opportunities for self-directed time are also provided, aided by access to a bus service to Bath. Inspectors did not agree with the view expressed by a minority of pupils in the questionnaires, that weekend activities were poor. Similarly, inspectors found the food to be nutritious and well presented, and a large number of pupils to whom they spoke were happy with it, in contrast to the views of some pupils in the questionnaires. Meals are freshly prepared according to an extensive menu, with special events such as an American themed menu on

Thanksgiving Day. Pupils have access to fresh fruit at every meal and in houses in the evening, and can make snacks in their houses at suitable times of day. Afternoon tea is available, as well as provision in the school cafe and house tuck shops. Pupils are allowed to have mobile phones, but in view of limited connectivity all houses are equipped with land line telephones for pupils to use, ensuring they can maintain contact with home. Additionally, most of the campus has Wi-Fi connectivity. The school communicates effectively with parents, carers and guardians.

- 4.22 Procedures for the welfare and safeguarding of boarders are excellent. The school has met all the recommendations in the recent inspections. For example, the single central register is carefully maintained and background checks on staff are comprehensive. The school has appropriate procedures for making arrangements for the off-site accommodation of any staff subject to allegations. Safeguarding training is conducted regularly, and included in induction. Regular reviews are carried out. Risk assessments are meticulously produced, both for visits out of school and activities within it. Arrangements for health and safety and for fire prevention are secure. All houses are made secure with keypads and alarms. Pupils say they feel safe at school. Visitors are welcomed and suitably supervised. Although criticism was expressed in some questionnaires, pupils said their possessions were generally safe and that, on occasions when theft occurs, house staff are quick to respond. Inspectors found the arrangements to be satisfactory overall. The school's ethos encourages good behaviour both in the houses and around the school. Pupils are generally lively, well-mannered and articulate. Such disciplinary sanctions as are occasionally necessary were largely said to be fair and appropriate in discussion, though there was criticism of this in some questionnaires; inspectors found in discussion with pupils that the arrangements were fair overall. Bullying is reported to be very rare and staff take action promptly. Relationships are such that pupils move responsibly about the site, so that duty staff know where they are. There is an effective missing child procedure, which is known to all house staff but has not been invoked recently.
- 4.23 Boarding is well led and managed, as seen in the smooth running of the boarding houses and in the boarders' personal development. Senior managers have produced comprehensive and detailed pastoral policies, which set out clear priorities and underpin the management of houses and offer guidance, as necessary, to housestaff. Appropriate records are kept within houses and staff are fully aware of national requirements. The atmosphere within each house, actively fostered by the housestaff, is relaxed and positive. Effective informal communication occurs between house staff. This group offers support to one another, for example when new housestaff take up their post, and this level of communication creates a strong sense of mutual respect and community. Pastoral committee meetings occur every three weeks to discuss pastoral matters and their improvement across the school community. Senior boarding staff are offered regular in-service training, although training and support for other pastoral staff in areas other than in welfare, health and safety, is less consistent. Housestaff give freely of their time to provide high quality care for pupils.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

- 5.1 The quality of governance is good.
- 5.2 The trustees and governors successfully share a common purpose in seeking to create a Catholic community in which care for and support of others is as important as achieving high standards of academic success. The presence of the Abbey and the role played by monks in the chaplaincy team contribute much to the Christian ethos of the school. The relationship between the Abbey and school has recently been altered and a revision of its instrument of government has recently been approved in principal.
- 5.3 At present, the governing body act as the agent of the trustees and take an energetic interest in the life of the school. They have worked with the head and senior leadership to identify key priorities and ways of working towards them, so that pupils achieve the highest academic and personal standards. Governors have a clear commitment to monitoring and raising standards and a sharp sense of urgency for improvement. As new members join, governors bring an increasing range of expertise and experience to their work and training for new governors is planned. Regular reports give governors a clear insight into the health and working of the school, and enable them in turn to provide support, counsel and challenge to the staff, as well as to plan effectively for investment in staff, accommodation and resources, though standards in boarding accommodation remain variable. Financial management is prudent.
- 5.4 Governors bring expertise in areas such as health and safety, and they review matters of welfare, health and safety more than annually, thus meeting their legal obligations. In response to recommendations in previous inspections, they have overseen substantial improvements that ensure full compliance in the area of safeguarding, child protection arrangements and staff recruitment and now monitor these areas carefully.
- 5.5 Since the inspection in November 2010, governors and trustees have ensured major improvements in safeguarding have taken place. In particular, a trustee with specialised training and an experienced governor both review the single central register regularly and a committee containing both governors and trustees meets termly to discuss all aspects of safeguarding, so that both governors and trustees are able to review the procedures. As a result of these changes, the standards noted on the visit of November 2011 have been maintained and further improved since. Arrangements for recruiting staff are robust, checks on monks are completed by the school and recorded in the single central register, and both staff and monks receive child protection training. In addition, governors have ensured that risk assessments are now more thorough and that the school has a three-year accessibility plan.
- 5.6 Governors have also been working with trustees and the charity commissioners on an increased role for governors, the principles of which were approved by the trustees shortly after the inspection; these will give the governors full authority in all matters to do with pupils and their education. The new constitution, as proposed, delegates all of the responsibility for the oversight of the school to the governors, with trustees retaining final approval over the governors' recommendations in a few

areas such as the appointment and dismissal of the head, and of overall but not of detailed budgeting. The proposals are designed to provide a much greater separation between the management of the monastery and the management of the school, whilst giving assurance to the trustees of the continuance of the school's Catholic nature. The proposed changes include the possibility of both a lay chair and head, and a change in proprietor from trustees to the governing body.

### **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.7 The quality of leadership and management, including of links with parents and other carers, is good.
- 5.8 The school's senior leadership share a clear strategic vision and have introduced effective structures, which give the school a strongly focused educational direction and provide for its continued development in accordance with its aims. The recent restructuring of the senior team, together with new appointments to key posts, has brought fresh purpose and vigour to the school's leadership. This restructuring has made good use of individual strengths and produced a strong team fully committed to developing the academic and pastoral culture of the school further. The team focuses closely on the needs of the pupils, sets high standards and is robust in seeking to put policy into practice. Senior staff reflect carefully on their work, evaluating successes and future priorities with care.
- 5.9 New staffing in human resources ensures that full attention is now given to recruitment; these arrangements are thorough. The procedures for recruiting staff are now robust, the single central register is carefully maintained, and it includes both school and monastery personnel. Any issues relating to safeguarding are considered most thoroughly, in conjunction with the local area designated officer. Staff, monks and all who work in the monastery receive the required child protection training.
- 5.10 Since the previous inspection, the monitoring of teaching and learning has become more rigorous. Strategies for improvement have been developed in the light of good practice in both the maintained and independent sectors, and have resulted in greater consistency in the quality of teaching although a small amount still falls short of a good or excellent standard. The plan is shared with, and supported by, the governors. Communication is strong, with a detailed structure of meetings, and clear expectations of staff. This greater consistency contributes to the excellent standard of the pupils' achievements, as well as to the excellence of their personal development. Regular departmental reviews and the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have resulted in heads of faculty and pastoral managers becoming increasingly accountable, although the implementation of policies across and within departments lacks complete consistency. Whilst staff have had opportunities to be involved in the development of academic strategies, and are encouraged to contribute to a regular review process, not all have felt fully engaged in the planning process.
- 5.11 Ambitious priorities for school development are clearly identified, pursued and reviewed. Development planning seeks to address identified weaknesses whilst promoting and enhancing the school's strengths. The development plan is reviewed annually and linked to the school's aims. Targets are demanding and are clearly communicated to both pupils and members of staff. Progress towards targets and

outcomes is considered frequently by heads of faculty, both in formal meetings and through day-to-day discussion with senior management.

- 5.12 Development planning in most departments is good, but some plans are insufficiently detailed or too loosely aligned with the overarching strategy, a fact which the senior team acknowledges. Departmental handbooks vary in quality, the best providing very helpful guidance together with careful analysis of academic successes and priorities. Most heads of faculty make effective use of the considerable amounts of academic data they are given to monitor the pupils' progress, but some departments have still to embrace fully the support this can give to raising quality in both learning and teaching.
- 5.13 The recent changes in the management structure have increased collaboration between pastoral and academic middle management. Pastoral leadership and management are strong, based on a highly effective house system under senior oversight, and ensure that pupils find teachers to be approachable, easily available and a source of good advice. Effective structures ensure that policies are regularly reviewed. The school leaders and managers ensure that all staff are trained in safeguarding, health and safety, areas where management is now strong. However, the provision of high quality pastoral care makes considerable demands on the management of staff time.
- 5.14 The school attracts able, well-qualified, motivated teaching staff. They participate fully in the life of the community and provide high-quality academic and pastoral care and guidance. Careful attention is paid to the induction of new teachers, and staff are supported in gaining further qualifications and attending appropriate training. Regular appraisals of the work of boarding house staff take place, but there is no systematic appraisal to identify the professional development needs of all other staff, including senior managers.
- 5.15 Links with parents are excellent overall. They are very satisfied with the education and support that the school provides, as shown in the highly positive responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires. They expressed approval for the subjects and activities on offer and were pleased with the support that pupils receive from the caring and considerate staff. Parents were particularly appreciative of the boarding experience and would happily recommend the school to others. A small number of parents did not feel that the school handled their concerns well, but this view was not supported by the sample of correspondence viewed by inspectors, all of which closely followed the school's stated policy.
- 5.16 Parents feel well informed. There is strong communication from the school both through the parents' handbook, the availability of the required policies and through regular updates on the website.
- 5.17 Parents are welcomed at school events. Individual houses run *At Home* events, whilst informal contact maintains an important link between school, pupil and home, by offering advice and support. Some parents are involved with interviewing sixth formers as part of their university application preparation.
- 5.18 Parents value the emphasis that the school places on the individual. Staff know their pupils well and are approachable whenever parents have queries. When concerns are raised, either academic or pastoral, most parents feel that they are taken seriously and resolutions are reached swiftly.

- 5.19 There are annual parent conferences for each year group, which provide the opportunity for parents to discuss their children's progress in detail. Termly reports, as well as half-termly grades and tutor comments, aimed at providing parents with regular summary and assessment of their children's progress, are detailed and comprehensive. Teachers know their pupils well and identify their learning needs clearly. Together with the target grades sent, the reports assist in giving the best possible advice as to how parents can support pupils' learning.

**What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.**