

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Gad's Hill School

Full Name of the School	Gad's Hill School
DCSF Number	886/6007
Registered Charity Number	803153
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Headmaster	Mr David Craggs
Chairman of Governors	Mr John Melville
Age Range	3 to 16
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	12th to 15th November 2007

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

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Gad's Hill is based at the former home of Charles Dickens in Higham, just north of Rochester. It was founded as a girls' school in 1924 by Miss Burt, but has taken boys since 2001. It provides day education for pupils aged between 3 and 16. Pupils leave to attend local sixth forms or colleges though, just before the inspection, governors had agreed to create a sixth form when practicable. The current headmaster has been in post since 2000.
- 1.2 The school has a total of 181 boys and 190 girls. Of these, 80 pupils are in the kindergarten which includes Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2; 97 pupils are in the junior school, for those in Years 3 to 6; and 194 are in the senior school, for pupils in Years 7 to 11. The head of the junior school oversees pupils in both kindergarten and junior school, and the head of the senior school looks after pupils from Year 7 upwards. Pupils are drawn from a range of backgrounds over a wide catchment area, with most travelling to school by car.
- 1.3 Pupils are admitted following interview and a taster day, with an examination for those entering the senior school. The analysis of standardised tests shows that pupils are of a broad range of ability which is around the national average. If they perform in line with their abilities at GCSE, their results will be in line with the national average for pupils in maintained secondary schools. Pupils do not take moderated national tests at ages 7 or 11. The school has no pupils for whom English is an additional language, but 28 have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), all of whom receive additional support. The school has no pupils with statements of special educational need.
- 1.4 The school states that education should be about learning for life and that academic education should be balanced by activities outside the curriculum, to develop self-confidence as well as a wider range of skills. It believes that pupils should be happy and that the school should be a close knit and friendly community.

- 1.5 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 tables. For brevity, the kindergarten and junior school are referred to as the junior school throughout.

Junior School

School	NC name
KN	Nursery
KR	Reception
K1	Year 1
K2	Year 2
J3	Year 3
J4	Year 4
J5	Year 5
Remove	Year 6

Senior School

School	NC name
Shell	Year 7
Lower 4 th	Year 8
Upper 4 th	Year 9
Lower 5 th	Year 10
Upper 5 th	Year 11

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 All pupils receive an education entirely consistent with the school's aim that the curriculum should be broad, varied and exciting. Since the last inspection, facilities for information and communication technology (ICT) have been greatly improved, with new specialist rooms and interactive whiteboards in all classrooms. However, the library still does not support learning sufficiently well.

Junior School

- 2.2 The junior school curriculum combines breadth and balance, with a high priority given to developing linguistic, mathematical and technological skills. In the Foundation Stage, the curriculum is carefully planned around the Early Learning Goals. In Years 1 and 2, the emphasis on literacy and numeracy, within a topic-based curriculum, works well. Older pupils receive a well-rounded education overall, but the absence of art in Year 6 limits creative development, though some opportunities for this occur in design technology (DT). The school takes a successful multi-disciplinary approach to personal, social and health education (PSHE), with topics discussed in form time and assemblies, and through other subjects. The significant improvement in ICT facilities is reflected in rapidly developing skills throughout the junior school, used well in some subjects but not uniformly. The appointment of two new staff has enabled some expansion of physical education (PE) and games.
- 2.3 Curricular planning in the Foundation Stage is detailed and effective, supporting progression well. In Years 1 and 2, planning is thorough, although with minor inconsistencies in the format and amount of detail. In Years 3 to 6, planning varies more widely, making continuity and progression difficult to monitor. Over-reliance on published schemes, without tailoring them sufficiently to pupils' needs or abilities, limits their effectiveness, especially where a faster pace would be more appropriate. However, in the best planning, activities are specifically tailored to pupils' needs; for example English lessons in both Year 2 and Year 6 included written activities which were different for the three ability groups and well matched to their abilities. However, this good practice is not carried out universally.
- 2.4 Pupils' experiences are enriched by a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities. A varied programme of visits and innovative themed days greatly enhances their learning throughout the year. For example, residential visits for Years 5 and 6 and an activities week for all add much to pupils' education.
- 2.5 The transition from year to year is well thought out. Staff work hard to help pupils with their personal development, encouraging greater independence and self-confidence as pupils move through the school. The induction programme, which prepares Year 6 pupils well for the move to Year 7, is valued by pupils and parents alike.

Senior School

- 2.6 The senior school also provides a generally broad and well-balanced curriculum, which supports pupils' intellectual, physical, social and moral development well. As in the junior school, provision for PE, games and swimming has been significantly enhanced by increasing the number of qualified staff. In Years 7 to 9, the range of subjects is wide, except that it does not include art; however, the DT course again develops some drawing and other creative skills. Although investigative skills are now given more prominence in Years 7 to 9, the shortage of time for science in Years 10 and 11 limits opportunities for practical work in

those years. All pupils in Years 8 and 9 belong to the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), which they may continue in Year 10; it has proved very popular with pupils, who report that they are getting more out of it than expected. In Years 10 and 11, the school offers a broad range of GCSEs, in addition to vocational courses in ICT, music, drama and public services, the last obtained through the CCF. The recently introduced option arrangements for GCSE courses in Year 10 have been welcomed, though some hard choices still have to be made, for example between history and geography.

- 2.7 Subject documents vary in quality and detail, though the best handbooks provide a clear overview of both aims and objectives, and a recommended approach to teaching, learning and assessment. In a few subjects, the school relies too heavily on commercial schemes, with too little adaptation to best suit pupils' needs. Teaching is organised appropriately: most subjects are taught in mixed-ability classes with the exceptions of French, set by ability in Years 7 to 9, and mathematics, set by ability in Years 8 to 11.
- 2.8 A wide range of extra-curricular clubs expands pupils' interests and personal development, and provides them with opportunities to take part in sporting, musical, dramatic, creative and intellectual activities. Educational trips, including those to Belgium and France, enhance their academic, intellectual and cultural development. Pupils in Year 10 value opportunities for work experience. The annual activity week provides many enriching experiences, including a community day when Year 10 pupils entertain elderly visitors.
- 2.9 Careers specialists help pupils make informed decisions about further education. All pupils in Year 10 are interviewed, and Year 11 pupils and their parents are invited to a post-16 options evening. PSHE also prepares pupils for adult life and a recent audit has identified aspects that are covered through other subjects, form periods and in assemblies. However, as the school knows, monitoring is currently insufficient to ensure that all areas are covered consistently.

Whole School

- 2.10 Provision for pupils with LDD is satisfactory. Pupils are identified promptly, individual learning support provided and individual education plans (IEPs) are drawn up. The learning support co-ordinator keeps staff and parents well informed. She shares IEPs with staff to ensure they are aware of pupils' difficulties; nevertheless specific support in lessons is inconsistent, with few specifically tailored activities and little use of laptops to support writing. However, teachers' caring attitudes and close knowledge of their pupils enable informal help to be provided on most occasions.
- 2.11 The programme for gifted and talented pupils is still in its infancy. While pupils are identified through the analysis of standardised scores, limited extension is provided to meet their needs at present. However, the learning support co-ordinator has recently taken on responsibility for this area and is keen to improve the quality of support.
- 2.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.13 Pupils are well educated, both when they move from the junior school to the senior school and when they leave the senior school at age 16. Pupils' academic success is complemented by their fluency in ICT, their communication skills and their achievements outside the classroom. Standards have been improved in mathematics and ICT since the last inspection and have been maintained elsewhere.

Junior School

- 2.14 Pupils in the Foundation Stage progress well towards the Early Learning Goals, and build on these achievements as they move up through the school. By the time they are in Year 6, pupils have a secure grasp of ideas and apply their knowledge, skills and understanding to new problems, for example in a historical detective game. They frame their own questions to explore characters in English and show a good grasp of logic when conducting database searches in ICT. They make deductions in history and demonstrate understanding when answering questions. Outside the classroom, they sing with both confidence and poise, and produce a junior school newspaper, which is all their own work.
- 2.15 From an early age, pupils speak confidently and write accurately. They take large parts in school assemblies, performing with conviction and feeling. Older pupils produce extended writing of quality, and both ask and answer questions in class. Pupils use mathematical language well and enjoy using an instructional computer programme to support work in other subjects. They use their ICT skills in subjects such as English, mathematics and history, but say they use them less frequently elsewhere.
- 2.16 Pupils produce creative and extended work in English and work independently in some of their science lessons. They enjoy practical activity and even the youngest pupils have the confidence to present ideas of their own in class. From Nursery onwards, pupils enjoy positive relationships with their peers and work well, both in pairs and in groups. They engage well with lessons, whether linking *Star Wars* to current headlines in a national newspaper, or working with concentration at a computer.

Senior School

- 2.17 From when they arrive in Year 7, pupils talk about their work with confidence and learn new material quickly. By Year 11, they show a thorough knowledge and understanding of ideas across a wide range of subjects, with less able pupils successfully attempting challenging work and all pupils applying ideas to new situations. Pupils draw on prior learning, both in written work and when contributing to class discussion. When teachers' expectations are particularly high, pupils respond well and achieve high standards, for example when discussing adaptive ecology in geography. In many lessons, pupils' progress is enhanced because they evaluate what they have learned, analyse each other's work or can see how to move their own understanding forwards. In contrast, they sometimes fail to capitalise on their written work by not responding fully to teachers' comments.
- 2.18 In GCSE, pupils achieve well, since their results are above the average for all maintained secondary schools overall; however, although the proportion of grades A*-C is significantly above the national average, the proportion of A*/A grades is a little below it. In almost all subjects, pupils make substantial gains. The analysis of standardised data shows that pupils progress well as they move through the school. Pupils in the CCF work successfully towards the BTEC First Diploma in Public Services and in mathematics pupils obtain certificates in the UK Maths Challenge.

- 2.19 Pupils use their literacy skills across the curriculum. They are confident and articulate when discussing their work, listen carefully to each other and write fluently. They use graphs and other aspects of mathematics in science and geography. Because all pupils take a vocational course in ICT, they have extremely well-developed skills, which enable them to design websites and present information imaginatively and creatively. These skills are used in most other subjects, though the analytical elements of ICT are not as fully integrated into pupils' work in subjects such as mathematics and science, as the skills of research and presentation are. However, pupils analyse data in geography coursework, create 'Stop Children Working in Mines' posters in history, make extensive use of word-processing, and present ideas about road safety and renewable energy in science. Although the school lacks the facilities for teachers to bring whole classes to the ICT suite regularly, pupils make full use of the ICT facilities at lunchtime and after school, as well as using their own machines for homework.
- 2.20 Pupils debate and argue in a constructive way, presenting their point of view with conviction and supporting it with evidence. They appreciate sensitive issues such as those relating to Bloody Sunday, and understand that sensitivities can affect objectivity in reporting. They respond well in question-and-answer sessions, and ask thoughtful questions of their own. They make their own notes in subjects such as science and history, and work closely together both in pairs and in larger groups. Classroom relationships are first class.
- 2.21 For the most part, pupils sustain concentration and are fully involved in their work. They much enjoy the puzzles and games which feature in some lessons, but are not deterred by hard graft. They are equally enthusiastic outside the classroom, whether preparing to present a class assembly, taking on a much taller team in netball or enjoying the more physical nature of rugby.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.22 Pupils' considerable personal development meets the school's aims well. Since the last inspection, their personal awareness has been heightened by ensuring they contribute in many areas, including running extra-curricular activities, raising money for charities, participating in visits, receiving visitors and joining the CCF.
- 2.23 Pupils have a genuine sense of purpose and self-awareness, both in and out of lessons. They communicate appropriately, learn about themselves and explore how to relate to others. Younger pupils performed with self-confidence, both in a school concert and in an assembly taken by Year 5. Those nearing the end of their time at the school are mature and self-reliant. Pupils think for themselves, and make use of their reflections in lessons; for example, in English a Year 7 class had a fruitful and mature discussion on 'the experience of being alive'. Courage and respect for others are fostered through cadets. Pupils have a great respect for themselves and others, as is seen around the school; a Year 7 pupil opened a door for a Year 11 pupil, who thanked him. Pupils challenge their peers over any negative behaviour. This is supported in English by a strong emphasis on cultural harmony.
- 2.24 Pupils have a mature understanding of actions and their consequences, knowing the difference between right and wrong. They are aware of the need for a considerate lifestyle and of the importance of understanding the views of others; for example, they discussed sexually transmitted diseases in a mature, informed and sensitive manner. Well-managed discussion on issues such as child abuse, autism and bullying encourages pupils to discuss ethical problems. Teachers reinforce issues raised in assemblies through other lessons; for example, one teacher brought the message, 'don't give up', into a French lesson to reinforce the importance of a commitment to personal values. The CCF provides further opportunities to learn how to deal with, and make judgements on, moral dilemmas. Pupils take a pride in

their school, for instance in their uniform, the historic setting and the school environment. Even in the Nursery, pupils take turns and share activities, appreciating the needs of others.

- 2.25 Pupils' rapid social development is seen in the many ways in which they work as part of a team, and by how they treat others. Pupils behave well when moving between lessons, and relate positively to those around them, whether they are their teachers, their peers or visitors to the school. Older pupils reflect on their contribution to society and develop greater respect for others, for example by studying literature that covers issues such as homelessness, mental illness and loneliness. They have visited a hospice, spent time in a retirement home and helped in a Cub Scout pack. Year 6 pupils show that they understand how society functions, answering questions about the government, the police and charities. Pupils of all ages show an appropriate knowledge and understanding of public services.
- 2.26 Pupils have developed a wide understanding of their own and other cultures by exploring their assumptions and values through numerous activities. These have included watching Chinese dancers and eating Chinese food, attending a French Day and commemorating Divali and Sukkot. Year 10 pupils have studied the history of medicine and how it has been used around the world. Pupils participate in many cultural events outside school, including concerts in Chatham and Rochester Cathedral. They also enjoy visits to the city of Rochester, its high street and castle. They have produced posters, displays and exhibitions to reinforce the school's cultural values and its openness to diverse cultures.
- 2.27 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.28 Teaching is good overall; most teaching is good or better and a small minority is excellent. Only occasionally is it less than satisfactory. Most lessons meet the school's aim that teaching should be stimulating. Since the last inspection, the teaching of mathematics has improved and the school has started to make more use of standardised data to monitor pupils' progress.

Junior School

- 2.29 Throughout the school, teaching generally provides well for pupils of all abilities and needs, being based on an accurate understanding of such needs. Teachers are almost always both caring and sensitive when dealing with them. The majority of teaching sets tasks which provide targets at which pupils of all abilities can aim and questions to challenge pupils' thinking. In a few lessons, teachers fail to provide fully for pupils' differing needs and this results in a lack of challenge for the most able pupils.
- 2.30 Teaching is almost always well organised, with a wide variety of activities providing enjoyable and lively lessons of brisk pace. Only a minority of lessons are poorly planned, with ideas introduced in an unstimulating way, or a pace that is too slow. The best lessons often feature games and exercises which capture pupils' imaginations and make learning fun. In these lessons, pupils of all abilities are challenged and pupils are encouraged to think for themselves.
- 2.31 Teaching is supported by thorough subject knowledge and is enhanced by the excellent use of interactive whiteboards to extend learning. Teachers explain ideas clearly and use resources effectively, though in DT the lack of a teaching assistant means that too much time is spent providing materials and not enough on meeting pupils' needs. Pupils are managed well and relationships in class are good. Much marking provides effective feedback to

pupils, but some fails to provide constructive comment, showing pupils how to improve their work. In the longer term, the limited amount of formal assessment against national norms makes it difficult for teachers to monitor pupils' progress effectively.

Senior School

- 2.32 In the best lessons, teachers plan carefully to provide pupils of differing abilities or needs with tasks and questions matched accordingly. Occasionally the most able pupils are not fully challenged, and the proportion of A*/A grades is relatively less good as a result. For example, in mathematics, although pupils in different sets are given different work, those in each set are usually given the same tasks despite the spread of ability. As a result, the pace is too slow for the most able, and support for the least able is not targeted carefully enough. Nevertheless, pupils are very positive about the support available outside class, which often involves teachers helping pupils at lunchtimes or after school.
- 2.33 In the best lessons, teachers make their aims clear and plan well-structured sessions which develop from an effective starter activity into a varied succession of tasks. These maintain pupils' interest and sense of enjoyment, whilst building up ideas in a logical way. However, a minority of teaching is too pedestrian, with little structure and a slow pace; pupils are given too few opportunities for co-operative or independent working, and become too passive in their response.
- 2.34 In most lessons, teachers set high standards and expect pupils to work hard. They introduce stimulating and original activities and thus capture pupils' attention. They promote research, encourage pupils to express their views and ask open-ended questions. This leads to productive and confident discussion, helps pupils to evaluate their learning and encourages constant improvement. Occasionally, however, the teaching is too directive, questions are closed rather than open, and practical activity too infrequent.
- 2.35 Teachers understand their subjects well, and make excellent use of interactive whiteboards to make teaching more interesting and effective; in almost all lessons, pupils are involved in their use. Pupils enjoy first-class relationships with their teachers, and lessons proceed in a calm and friendly manner.
- 2.36 Marking is satisfactory overall. Much of it provides good feedback. However, too much fails to follow the school's marking policy, being limited to a tick or cross and giving no target for improvement. Even where marking is thorough, pupils often ignore the comments made. The school makes detailed use of information from standardised data and other assessments to monitor pupils' progress through the school and to assist in planning.

Whole School

- 2.37 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

- 3.1 The good level of care that staff show towards pupils contributes much to their personal development and well-being. The school is particularly successful in its aim to provide a happy family atmosphere in which all pupils are valued. Since the last inspection, it has appointed additional senior staff to oversee pastoral care in each part of the school, and introduced a variety of systems to enable staff to be aware of problems more quickly.

Junior School

- 3.2 Staff provide a considerable level of support and guidance for all pupils, as is evident in the relationships between pupils and their teachers and in the consideration shown for pupils' individual needs. For example, teachers' care and attention for the youngest pupils in the dining hall is particularly supportive, as it enhances pupils' social skills and etiquette whilst assisting catering staff with arrangements. Staff are supported by effective pastoral arrangements, centred around the role of the form tutor.
- 3.3 The quality of the relationships between staff and pupils is generally good and amongst pupils in the junior school it is, for the most part, positive and harmonious. The school encourages links between different age groups, for instance through older pupils teaching younger ones about the traditions, food and culture of different countries. Pupils described the school as like a large family where everyone knows each other. Generally, pupils respect each other and respect adult members of the school community. Staff encourage this by praising pupils warmly. A small minority of upper junior pupils said they were not convinced about how well the school deals with incidents of bullying, though the vast majority are confident of the school's response should an incident occur.
- 3.4 Positive behaviour is encouraged through merits, super stars and headmaster's certificates; these are presented in special assemblies to which parents are invited. The value pupils place on these awards was seen when a Year 2 pupil invited all of the children in the class to congratulate another pupil who had just received an award. Sanctions are deliberately limited but clearly understood by pupils. A system of demerits provides a suitable deterrent for breaches of the school or class rules. A postcard system allows pupils to alert senior staff to any inappropriate behaviour or bullying. This is mainly successful and, during interviews with pupils, most stated that this was a good way of dealing with problems without having to confront the perpetrator themselves.

Senior School

- 3.5 Very effective support and guidance are given to all pupils. Staff are helped in the day-to-day pastoral care of their pupils by a well-planned structure, within which information is shared between staff so that all can contribute to pupils' care.
- 3.6 Relationships between pupils and staff, as well as among pupils themselves, are respectful and constructive. Pupils are supportive of one another; teaching and non-teaching staff are polite towards them and they respond courteously. Older pupils know most of the younger ones and both care for them and take responsibility for them, for example when carrying out playground duties or when looking after Foundation Stage pupils on sports day.
- 3.7 Measures to promote self-discipline and behaviour in all areas of the school are highly effective. The school's policy to combat bullying is comprehensive and widely understood.

Any problems are dealt with promptly, fairly and effectively. Throughout the school, teachers reward positive achievement and behaviour with commendations and distinctions, which contribute towards the confidence and self-esteem which pervades the school.

Whole School

- 3.8 The school has well-defined procedures for dealing with any child protection issues which arise. Pupils are well cared for by the school nurse, who provides a confidential service to them; the school also has a good number of first-aiders. The school has carried out appropriate fire risk assessments and conducts necessary checks, inspections and practices. It has well-defined health and safety arrangements and takes care over registration and admissions arrangements. It has also carried out an access audit for pupils with disabilities and is committed to developing access further.
- 3.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.10 The school has established links of exceptional quality with parents and the community, building further on the links at the time of the last inspection. The school meets its aims of providing a friendly, family atmosphere which plays a positive role in the lives of pupils, parents and family. Very positive links with the local community make an important contribution to pupils' wider education and these relationships promote their mental, spiritual, cultural and physical development well.
- 3.11 The parents of about half the pupils responded to a questionnaire distributed before the inspection. In their replies, an overwhelming majority were very satisfied with the education and support provided for their children. They were particularly pleased with the quality of teaching and the progress their children make; with the quality of support and guidance; with the range of activities and with the attitudes and values the school promotes. Inspectors agreed with all of these views. A minority of parents were concerned about homework, but inspectors found that arrangements are generally satisfactory.
- 3.12 Parents feel welcome in the school and are actively involved, both in supporting a variety of activities and in the work and progress of their children. They mix easily with other parents and staff at the tea cabin in the car park at the beginning and end of the school day. The Friends of Gad's Hill School are successful in raising funds to support the school. Their activities have, in recent years, included helping to pay for a new school minibus, providing new sound and lighting equipment for the hall and new facing of the tennis and netball courts, as well as purchasing play equipment for younger pupils. They regularly accompany pupils on school trips. Several governors are current parents.
- 3.13 Parents receive clear and helpful information about their children's work and progress. Staff write detailed reports about pupils' academic achievements, extra-curricular activities and personal development. Meetings are held at which parents discuss academic and other matters at least once a year for each year group. Parents throughout the school feel able to make contact with teachers from day to day as the need arises. This open-door policy is apparent in all sections of the school. The school has a formal complaints policy which has only been invoked once. It handles other concerns with care.
- 3.14 The school has extensive links with the wider community. The Year 1 and 2 nativity play is presented to Gravesend Age Concern, while pupils raise money for Wheelchairs in Less Economically Developed Countries, and for the preservation of 'The Medway Queen', which

took part in the Dunkirk evacuation. They support the salary of a teacher in a remote area of Kenya. In the Autumn term, pupils give their harvest produce to the homeless in Gravesend. These community links provide excellent support for the enrichment of pupils' educational experience.

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

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Close contact between school and governing body underpins all that the school does and enables it to achieve its aims. This good sense of teamwork has been maintained since the time of the last inspection.
- 4.2 Governors bring a wide range of experience and expertise to the school. The structure of main and sub-committee meetings serves the school well, providing opportunities for them to work professionally with all members of the senior management team (SMT), as well as with the headmaster. Governors are attached to individual departments and this contact is welcomed by staff, who appreciate the time that governors spend at school. The fact that about half the governors are current parents means that close contact is maintained with other parents, contributing to the school's strong sense of family.
- 4.3 Governors are aware of their responsibilities. For example, in addition to maintaining a close oversight of financial issues, they review both health and safety and child protection arrangements regularly. They are aware of training undertaken by members of staff and those governors with specific responsibilities have attended as well.
- 4.4 Governors thus know the school and its staff. They have confidence in the headmaster, but understand that they have a role to play in providing support and challenge, both to him and to other staff. They give appropriate attention to educational as well as business matters, and contribute to the school's evaluation of what it is achieving. Their long-term commitment to strategic planning provides a secure basis for the school's future.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 Strong leadership contributes much to the school's sense of purpose and to the achievement of its aims of promoting excellence, enthusiasm, friendship and success. Since the last inspection, members of the SMT have become more established in their roles.
- 4.6 The headmaster is seen by governors, staff and parents as providing clear-sighted vision for the school, which is reflected in all that the school achieves for its pupils and in the family ethos which it creates. He is supported by an enthusiastic and committed SMT who liaise well with other staff. This leadership group is seen as purposeful and accessible, and plays an important role in managing the programme of professional development to which the school gives a high priority. Liaison between junior and senior parts of the school is strong, providing continuity in the education pupils receive as they move through the school. Pupils' personal development is given a high priority and is supported through many areas of school life. Roles are generally well defined. However, whilst some heads of department and co-ordinators understand the importance of their roles in managing and leading their subjects, some are yet to provide full support for planning and teaching.
- 4.7 The school has developed well in many areas over the past few years, and has high quality development plans to guide it in the future. These address most areas of school life and show how each department is intended to contribute to the school's overall aims. It also has plans to develop new facilities for the whole school in the longer term. Policies and procedures cover all aspects of school life, but they are not prioritised in the staff handbook and thus not implemented consistently. For example, marking does not always provide suggestions for

improvement and set targets for pupils, as is required. Subject policies and schemes of work vary in quality and content.

- 4.8 The strong emphasis on professional development derives from the commitment of governors, headmaster and staff to reviewing and improving the quality of teaching and learning. The school is a reflective community, with pupils and staff evaluating lessons on a regular basis, and it has a well-developed programme of peer review and appraisal, much appreciated by staff. The school takes care over staff recruitment and has appropriate arrangements for the induction of newly qualified teachers, though it has none on the staff at present.
- 4.9 Financial management is secure and the school is generally well resourced. However, the school lacks a clear vision for the role of the library alongside the role of ICT and its use is underdeveloped. The school runs smoothly from day to day, due in no small part to the key role played by all members of the administrative, maintenance and catering staff. They are a key part of the school community with, for example, members of the catering staff singing in the choir.
- 4.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.11 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 Gad's Hill School provides an enthusiastic and friendly community within which pupils of all ages succeed well, as the school intends. Pupils appreciate the considerable amount of personal support they receive and the many opportunities open to them to take responsibility. They enjoy the combination of academic and vocational education, which prepares them well for later study and work, in particular by making them confident and articulate in speech and giving them high levels of skill in ICT. Much of the teaching is imaginative, challenging and varied but a minority fails to capture pupils' interest, provide sufficient opportunity for independent work or meet their individual needs. The quality of planning varies, with some tailored insufficiently to the needs of the school. Most marking provides good feedback but some provides little guidance as to how pupils can improve their work or fails to check that they have done so. The high priority given to pastoral care contributes to pupils' personal development, as do the varied enrichment opportunities in sport, music and a broad range of other activities, including CCF for older pupils. Links with parents are strong, with many taking advantage of the tea cabin at the corner of the car park at the beginning and end of the day to have informal contact with staff and other parents. The school is well supported by committed governors who know the school well, and by strong leadership in many areas from a headmaster and SMT who are clear about what makes the school distinctive.
- 5.2 Since the last inspection, facilities for ICT have been greatly improved, but the library still does not support learning sufficiently well. Standards of both teaching and mathematics have improved. The school makes more use of standardised data to monitor pupils' progress. Further opportunities have been provided to enhance pupils' personal development and additional senior staff have been appointed to oversee pastoral care in each part of the school. Members of the SMT have become more established in their roles.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no major weaknesses. To improve further the good quality of education it already provides, it should take the following action.
1. Further strengthen monitoring and management of the curriculum in order to ensure that:
 - teaching is always supported by detailed planning which reflects the particular needs of pupils at the school;
 - teaching always captures pupils' imaginations and provides well for their differing abilities;
 - marking always shows pupils how to improve their work, and checks that they have done this.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 12th to 15th November 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mr Ian Newton	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Katherine Greenwood	Head, ISA school
Mr Keith Knight	Head, ISA school
Mr Jon Smallwood	Vice Principal, ISA school
Mrs Margaret O'Connor	Head, ISA school
Mrs Francesca Southern	Deputy Head (Academic), HMC junior school