

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Fairfield Preparatory School

Full Name of the School	Fairfield Preparatory School
DfES Number	855/6000
Registered Charity Number	1081765
Address	Leicester Road, Loughborough, LE11 2AE
Telephone Number	01509 215172
Fax Number	01509 238648
Email Address	admin@fairfield.leics.sch.uk
Headmaster	Roger Outwin-Flinders
Chair of Governors	Michael Pearson
Age Range	4 - 11
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	5th – 8th June, 2006

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

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

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

Fairfield Preparatory School was originally the Lower School of Loughborough High School and became a preparatory school in its own right in 1969. It is part of the Loughborough Endowed Schools Foundation along with Loughborough Grammar School and Loughborough High School. The three schools are autonomous but share a board of governors; however, each school has its own, non executive, academic and planning sub-committee. All three schools are situated on the same extensive campus near the centre of the town. Fairfield has its own playing fields but shares the tennis/netball courts and synthetic playing surface with

Loughborough High School, and the indoor swimming pool with the two senior schools. The headmaster has been in post since 2001.

There are currently 488 pupils on roll, 253 boys and 235 girls. Sixty-three children are in Reception, 42 as part of the government-funded nursery scheme. Just under 20 per cent of the pupils come from minority ethnic groups. Ten pupils do not have English as their principal language; none of them need extra support. Pupils come from Loughborough and the surrounding area and when they leave Fairfield the vast majority go on to Loughborough Grammar School or Loughborough High School; in the last two years all pupils have gained places at their first choice schools.

Standardised tests indicate that the ability range is well above the national average. Therefore, if pupils are performing in line with their ability, their results in national tests will be well above the average for all maintained primary schools. No pupils have statements of special educational needs but 22 are on the school's register of special educational needs, most of whom have specific learning difficulties, for example, dyslexia.

Within a framework of traditional and family values the school aims to offer a broad, enlightened and ever changing curriculum. It promotes high levels of academic, sporting and musical achievement against a background of sensitive and well-co-ordinated pastoral care.

National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

Curriculum provision has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now outstanding. Major strengths include the wide range of experiences to enrich the curriculum, the programme of activities, learning support, provision for the gifted and talented and the quality of planning. The opportunities the school offers are open to all pupils and all have the possibility of representing the school or performing in public.

In accordance with its aims, the school offers a broad curriculum and includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum. In the pre-preparatory department, pupils experience a broad range of subjects, which are suitable for their ages and abilities. The nationally specified Early Learning Goals of the Foundation Stage are completed during the Reception year. In Years 1 and 2, the curriculum includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum with the addition of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). In Years 3 to 6, French is added. The issue of balance, raised at the time of the last inspection, has been addressed by a slight reduction in the amount of time given to English and mathematics.

The educational experiences in the school contribute effectively to pupils' progress in all areas of learning, particularly in English where the introduction of an extra daily reading session for the whole school and a weekly period of guided reading have further raised pupils' attainment in this area. A strong focus on speaking and listening skills supports the development of very good reading and writing skills. Attainment in mathematics is boosted by the practical mathematics sessions and the stimulus provided by the popular mathematics club and the National Mathematics Challenge. Considerably improved provision for ICT has led to pupils' increased confidence and competence in handling computers in many areas of the curriculum. Circle time and PSHCE have been carefully developed to support the school's aims and strengthen pupils' personal development. The curriculum is enriched by varied and frequent educational visits of scientific, historical and geographic interest and by a number of interesting visitors to school. A Year 5 visit to Selly Manor prompted the pupils to embark on a tapestry to mark the Queen's 80th birthday. A recent visit by a craftsman who demonstrated

his skills by creating a huge face from twisted willow inspired the creation of large butterflies and fish by Year 3. In addition, the school organises theme weeks for mathematics, science, art and drama.

An impressive range of well-organised extra-curricular activities further enriches pupils' experience. These include numerous sporting and musical activities as well as other activities as varied as bird watching and mind sports. The latter make a valuable contribution to the provision for gifted and talented pupils. The school takes care to organise a number of teams for almost all sports so that all who so wish have an opportunity to represent the school. Similarly in music, the school runs two orchestras and a number of choirs and ensembles. Some clubs, for example the 'green fingers' gardening and environmental club, arise from pupils' requests or suggestions. Pupils take part eagerly in the many activities, and the opportunities to play in teams and perform in musical and dramatic activities make an important contribution to their personal development.

Pupils are very well prepared as they move from one stage of their education to the next. Very good records and portfolios are passed from year to year throughout the school, and each pupil is discussed thoroughly by the current and receiving teachers. A familiarisation day enables all pupils to get to know their new teachers and surroundings before the end of the summer term, and the head of year and staff meet new Year 3 parents to explain the different regime. Preparation for transfer at age 11 starts early. All pupils gain entrance to their first choice of school, however, by the beginning of Year 5, those very few pupils unlikely to be successful in the eleven plus examinations are guided towards schools more suited to their abilities. The headmaster talks to parents about the process and pupils visit their new senior schools. Preparation for the eleven plus examination itself is very thorough.

The quality of planning is outstanding, whether in the long-, medium- or short-term. The schemes of work and subject policies have all been revised; they are comprehensive and well suited to the needs of the pupils.

Provision for those requiring learning support and for the gifted and talented is excellent. The few pupils for whom English is an additional language do not need support. Screening to identify problems or potential problems begins in Year 1, or earlier if necessary. Screening also identifies those pupils who, whilst appearing to be performing satisfactorily, are working below their potential in one or more aspects of their studies. Programmes of support are drawn up by the head of learning support who monitors pupils' progress very carefully. Support is given within the classroom and in individual and group lessons. A noticeable feature is the involvement of a large number of staff, including the senior management, in literacy and numeracy support work. Gifted and talented pupils are particularly well catered for. They are identified by screening and by teachers' recommendation. Very good coaching, from outside the school where appropriate, enables a considerable number of pupils to gain representative honours, at county level and beyond in a number of sports. In music, pupils make rapid progress because of the graded examinations and the many opportunities provided by the school to be involved in choral and instrumental activities. Very able pupils in Years 5 and 6 have sessions in advanced thinking-skills, involving a range of problem-solving activities.

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

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

The good standards noted at the time of the last inspection have been maintained and often improved, particularly by the end of Year 6. Pupils are well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding; they learn effectively and achieve well in both their academic subjects and in their activities. All pupils, including the most and the least able make good and sometimes outstanding progress during their time at the school.

In the pre-preparatory department, pupils read and write with confidence and enjoyment, thanks to the well focused support they receive. They have good numeracy skills and are able to apply these to practical situations. Pupils achieve good standards in art, music and physical education (PE).

Standards in Years 3 to 6 are good in most subjects, particularly in science where pupils apply their knowledge to new situations, and form and test hypotheses; they set up experiments and handle equipment competently and safely. The quality of writing is of a high standard both in English and in history where pupils make judgements about historical events and are able to justify them through reason and example. Pupils have good mathematical skills and the best are very competent at algebra. Pupils are outstandingly successful in the United Kingdom Mathematics Challenge.

Results in national tests at age seven show that pupils' performance is far above the national average in reading and mathematics and well above that average in writing. Such results are good given pupils' overall ability levels. At age 11, whilst pupils no longer take national tests, it is clear that achievement is high in many subjects and almost all pupils pass the eleven plus examination to selective senior schools. Standardised measures of progress indicate that pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress. No significant difference is apparent in the relative attainment of pupils in different classes or subjects, nor is there any marked difference in attainment between girls and boys.

The school's aim of developing the whole person, encouraging breadth of interests and setting high expectations results in high standards in a range of sporting and cultural activities. The school has a very good record for sport, each year winning major tournaments for soccer, hockey, netball, cricket, tennis and athletics. In some sports, there are as many as four teams per age group, allowing even modest players to represent the school, at an appropriate level, in keeping with the school's philosophy. More than 85 per cent of the pupils learn an additional instrument and large numbers are successful in music examinations up to an advanced level for their age. The school has two orchestras, the first of a high standard, and many ensembles and choirs, so that again pupils who wish to have every opportunity to play in public and before their peers. Apart from the outstanding results in the Mathematics Challenge, pupils are successful at national level in mini-bridge, in the National Junior Languages Challenge, and in a national general knowledge quiz.

At all stages and in most subjects, pupils are knowledgeable and are able to apply their knowledge and skills in new situations. In a geography lesson, pupils applied their knowledge of physical geography to the study of a river of their own choice. Pupils work well on their own or in groups and develop good independent working and research skills. In a Year 1 science lesson on light sources, children separated at different times into a variety of groups to suit the activity and worked effectively regardless of partner.

Pupils are articulate and enthusiastic; in the interviews, they were able to explain and discuss their work confidently and fluently and were never afraid to risk an opinion. The standard of pupils' grammar, spelling and creative writing is high across all subjects. Year 6 pupils wrote movingly to their absent 'fathers' about the bombing of London during The Second World War. Pupils' note-making skills improve as they move up the school, and by Year 6 pupils write accurate and convincing reports of their experiments.

Pupils have good mathematical skills in relation to their ability; they are able to apply mathematical concepts effectively at all levels and in a variety of contexts. Year 4 pupils discussing consecutive numbers during an interview were able to deduce patterns and a solution through collective mathematical discussion. Pupils hone their skills in the mathematics club and in the Junior Mathematics Challenge.

Pupils make effective use of information, communication and control technology (ICT) both as a separate subject and where it is integrated across the curriculum. They research the internet, access software and use word processing to enhance the appearance of their work. The school has made considerable strides in this area since the last inspection.

Throughout the school, pupils are encouraged to develop thinking and reasoning skills. Year 4 pupils debated the merits of school uniform in a balanced and logical way. 'Mind games' are an important part of the activities programme and large numbers play chess, bridge and other strategy games, often to a high level. The most able further develop their reasoning skills in special lessons where they discuss and try to find solutions to puzzles and conundrums.

Pupils of all ages and aptitudes are keen and interested in their work; they are well organised, settle quickly to their tasks and show impressive powers of concentration. They listen carefully and respectfully to each other's views and opinions; they share ideas and help each other but are capable of working independently when given the opportunity to do so. Their behaviour is excellent.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

By the time that pupils leave the school, they are remarkably mature, balanced, confident and thoughtful, thanks to the great care and attention that the school gives to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Contributory factors include the strong supportive ethos of the school, in which staff lead by example and all pupils are valued, and the well-developed PSHCE and religious education (RE) programmes.

Personal and spiritual growth is a strong feature of the school. Pupils feel valued and are given every opportunity to be successful and have their success, however modest, recognised so that they grow considerably in self-confidence and self-esteem. They remain modest, however, because they are taught equally to value the achievements of others. A striking image of the inspection was the shining eyes and happy face of a small girl being awarded a certificate for what for most people would be a modest achievement; she received enthusiastic applause. Pupils' self-confidence and maturity are demonstrated by the great pride and enthusiasm with which they describe their school as they show visitors around. Pupils further develop spiritually through lessons in RE and PSHCE where they explore values and beliefs and start to formulate their own response. Year 6 pupils about to embark on descriptive writing about a river listened to *Ol' Man River* and came to appreciate the river as a metaphor for life and how it might apply to them.

The school has high expectations of pupils' conduct and behaviour and pupils develop strong moral values. The Fairfield Focus, the moral for the week, is widely publicised and referred to in lessons to reinforce the message. Pupils are set a good example by staff, and are well able to distinguish between right and wrong. The school has a clear code of conduct, which pupils understand and respect, and the rare misdemeanours are dealt with sensitively. At all times, pupils are encouraged to think of the effect of their actions on others and on the whole school community. No opportunities are missed to raise moral issues wherever they occur, not only in PSHCE and in RE but in other areas of the curriculum. Year 4 pupils, for example, hotly debated the morality of animal testing.

Pupils develop very well socially, accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute to community life. The PSHCE course provides regular input into the children's education as citizens, from a basic understanding of public services in Year 1 through to an examination of issues in the media in Year 6, this year focusing on natural disasters and pupils' response to them. They learn about democratic processes through the school council which represents the voice of the pupils to the senior management. Their strong sense of community is reinforced by the house system; they identify with their house and work hard to contribute points to house competitions. The qualities of leadership

and teamwork are strong through the many activities which allow pupils to work as teams and take responsibility as form or house captains, sports captains, librarians and playground monitors. Pupils are aware that they are privileged and work very hard and successfully to help those in need through fund-raising for charitable causes.

Pupils develop a very thorough appreciation of their own culture and an understanding of other cultures; they learn to recognise and value diversity and difference. RE makes a considerable contribution, exploring all the major faiths and identifying not only the differences between them but also those features they have in common. The school celebrates not only Christian festivals but those of other religions. Pupils study other parts of the world in geography and learn about African and Eastern art and music. A Year 5 display on the reign of Elizabeth II recognised the cultural diversity of Great Britain and the contribution being made by those from minority ethnic groups. Additional appreciation of their own culture is gained through a wide range of educational visits to this country and abroad and visitors such as 'The Vikings'. Pupils' creative and artistic activities are a very strong feature of the school and significantly contribute to their cultural development. The vast majority of pupils learn an instrument in addition to the recorder and take part in musical activities; there are three dramatic productions a year and an art and drama week for Year 6; pupils' art work on display is outstanding; visits of artists and sculptors are an inspiration to the pupils.

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

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

The overall quality of teaching is good and in a sixth of the lessons seen it was outstanding, enabling pupils to make the excellent progress. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection. Well-informed use of the extensive assessment information and excellent planning enable all teachers to contribute to the very good provision for those with learning difficulties and the most able. On the relatively few occasions when the teaching was less effective, too much use was made of undemanding worksheets or an overlong introduction slowed down the pace of the lesson, causing pupils to lose interest.

Teachers have high expectations of their pupils, and their skill and commitment enable all pupils to make good and often excellent progress, as demonstrated by their success in the eleven plus examinations and in a wide spectrum of sports, music and activities. Through the screening process and constant monitoring of progress, teachers are well aware of their pupils' capabilities and plan meticulously to meet their needs, setting more challenging tasks for the most able and providing additional support for those having difficulty.

Teachers plan carefully and use a variety of strategies to help pupils to learn and advance their knowledge and skills. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace. By their own enthusiasm, teachers encourage pupils to apply themselves; they are particularly good at extending pupils' knowledge and understanding through skilful questioning, allowing pupils themselves to speculate. Year 3 children were led to identify and discuss types of human relationships depicted in pictures, drawings and photographs by analysing the body language displayed; and skilful questioning enabled Year 6 pupils to develop fuller understanding of Wordsworth poems. In some subjects, pupils are encouraged to do their own research and work on individual presentations but, overall, more use could be made of open-ended tasks to encourage individual response. Some of the worksheets used by older pupils are too tightly prescribed and inhibit pupils' responses.

The excellent relations between teachers and pupils and the enthusiastic, purposeful but encouraging teaching engage the pupils so that they settle quickly to the task, listen carefully and try hard. The positive learning atmosphere gives pupils the confidence to offer answers and explore

ideas even when they are not sure that they are right. Pupils move around the school and the classrooms quietly and efficiently and they have an air of purpose in their demeanour.

Teachers are very well qualified for the subjects they teach and make full use of the very good resources available, including the much improved provision for ICT. One Year 6 teacher projected computer images onto a white board in order to help pupils to draw moving figures, explaining the process beforehand to the classroom assistant so that she could be actively involved in the lesson. In a Year 2 geography lesson, pupils were able to extend their understanding of a plan view by zooming in on their school from a much less detailed picture. Teachers make good use of the excellent PE and sporting facilities, some of which are shared with the senior schools, to encourage performances of high quality from the pupils.

The quality of assessment is excellent; practices are comprehensive, consistent and well understood by both pupils and parents. Assessment is particularly effective in the pre-preparatory department, and in English, mathematics and science in the junior school. The twice-yearly assessments, based equally on test results and on class-work, are moderated to ensure consistency within subjects and across year groups. Assessment in other subjects, which has hitherto been less formal as a matter of policy, is currently under review. The quality of marking varies, though it is regular and accurate; the detailed, constructive comments and targets for improvement found in English are not always matched in other subjects. The school makes considerable use of standardised and screening tests to identify strengths and weaknesses and to calculate the progress pupils make while they are at the school. The results of these tests, and indeed of all assessments, are analysed carefully and serve to guide changes in curriculum planning and teaching strategy. Analysis of reading-test results prompted the school to institute a 15-minute, daily reading period and a weekly guided reading period, involving all staff, so that all pupils could have a concentrated period in small groups, at their own level. The strategy has resulted in impressive gains in standards of reading, as well as giving pupils the opportunity to enjoy more reading time in school.

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

THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

The quality of care that staff devote to the well being of their pupils and the attention given to welfare, health and safety are even greater than at the time of the last inspection and are now outstanding. Staff know their pupils extremely well and relate very well to them. Excellent relationships and a caring atmosphere prevail throughout the school and enable the school to meet its aims effectively.

The quality of care and the concern shown by staff for each individual pupil is considerable. Staff know the pupils very well and build up comprehensive records to inform them in their dealings. A register of health and emotional problems is kept for each year group. Class teachers carry out their pastoral responsibilities in an exemplary fashion. They are supported by a clear structure of responsibility through the heads of year to the head of pastoral care, and are guided in their task by the school's comprehensive policy documents. Leaflets of advice are also available, for example, 'Dealing with loss and grief' to assist teachers when the need arises.

The quality of relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils is excellent. Well-developed relationships prevail throughout the school and mutual respect, between teachers and pupils and among the pupils themselves, is clearly evident. Pupils respond extremely well to the school's encouragement to care for and show respect to others. Pupils were seen to behave

with the utmost courtesy towards one another even when they were unaware they were being observed.

Measures to promote good discipline and behaviour, including procedures to guard against harassment and bullying, are very effective and deal constructively with unacceptable behaviour when it occurs. There is an effective, well-understood system of rewards and sanctions which the pupils interviewed during the inspection perceived as being operated fairly by the staff. Incentives include the awarding of House points and a weekly trophy, and a variety of presentations to pupils in assembly. Pupils who produce work of exceptional quality are entered in the Book of Achievement. The code of conduct is issued to all pupils with clear expectations for pupils, staff and parents, and 'golden rules' are clearly displayed in all classrooms. Each week, the school focuses on a specific behaviour point which is published in the newsletter. The comprehensive anti-bullying policy is monitored by the head of pastoral care.

Appropriate, clear and effective child protection measures are in place. The head of pastoral care, who is the nominated officer, has undergone appropriate training, as has the headmaster, and all staff receive regular updating. A governor has a specific remit for child protection matters throughout all three schools.

The main responsibility for health and safety lies with the Foundation which takes its duties very seriously. Policies are reviewed as necessary to meet changes in legislation; regular inspections ensure that any risks from fire and other hazards are eliminated; stringent risk assessments are carried out for all activities and visits. In addition to the central provision, the school has its own health and safety committee which monitors issues as they arise.

Catering arrangements are very well organised. The catering staff are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and produce meals of high quality. Provision is made for all manner of special diets. In their replies to the questionnaire and when interviewed, pupils praised the quality of school meals.

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

The good relations between the school and parents and the community noted at the time of the last inspection have been further improved and are now excellent. Parents are very pleased with the education their children receive and they have more information and more opportunities to meet staff, formally and informally. The headmaster and staff are readily available to speak with parents, as needs arise. Any concerns are dealt with effectively. The Parent Teacher Association is an active and supportive body. Links with the community enrich the life of pupils, for example, through sporting and charity events.

Nearly three-quarters of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and more than nine out of ten were pleased with their children's experience. Parents are most pleased by the progress their children make at school, the breadth of the curriculum, the help and guidance provided, the values promoted by the school and the range of extra curricular activities. Nevertheless, significant minorities of parents expressed concern with the information they receive and the opportunities to discuss their children's progress, help with learning difficulties, and the lack of opportunities to be involved in the life and work of the school. The inspection team agrees with the positive views expressed but disagrees with parents' reservations. Parents receive very good information both about the school and their children's curriculum and progress. Inspectors consider that the provision for pupils experiencing difficulties is excellent.

Parents have excellent opportunities to be involved in activities in the school and in the work and progress of their children. In addition to the normal consultation meetings, other meetings take place to ensure that pupils have settled, for transfer from Year 2 to 3 and to explain

senior school choice. Parents have numerous opportunities to meet staff informally and formally throughout the year. The parent-teacher association is particularly active, organising a range of social and fund-raising events, including recently a fun day for new parents and a Divali dinner; the sums raised are considerable. Parents are involved directly with school activities in and out of the classroom; they help in the Reception class with practical activities; a parent helps with the Brownies group and some are involved in the Year 6 'Mind Sports' activity. More recently, parents were consulted as to their views on the school as part of an evaluation of the school conducted by an external agency.

Parents are provided with excellent information about the school and receive clear and useful reports about their children's work and progress. The school's comprehensive web site provides a wealth of information about the school and its activities, including a very well produced weekly newsletter, also available in hard copy; they also receive half-term and end-of-term letters, curriculum and sports booklets and an annual letter from the Chairman of Governors.

Reports are comprehensive, clear and well set out. The school is in the process of organising a new computerised system which teachers can access digitally. Reports for English, mathematics and science are very detailed and helpful but those for other subjects are less informative. The school is aware of this weakness and plans are already well advanced to deal with it.

The school handles the concerns of parents with due care. Most problems are dealt with swiftly and informally because the headmaster and his colleagues are readily available and approachable. Nevertheless, a formal complaints procedure is in place. All incidents and concerns are logged and the associated documentation indicates that they are dealt with comprehensively and sensitively.

The school is keen to promote links with the wider community. The headmaster maintains strong links with local nursery schools. Pupils take part, often very successfully, in local and county sports competitions. Musicians take part in music festivals and the choir has sung at Carillon Court and Belvoir Castle. The art department has mounted an exhibition in the local library. A range of visitors come to the school to talk to the children, and students from local colleges undertake work experience at the school. A variety of local clubs and groups use the school's sporting and other facilities.

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

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

The quality of governance is good; the main governing body makes clear the overall aims of the Foundation, it provides wise council and holds the school to account. Arrangements have improved significantly since the last inspection. Fairfield is one of three schools in the Loughborough Endowed Schools' Foundation and as such does not have its own governing body. Instead, the Foundation has appointed an academic and planning sub-committee which meets termly to discuss both academic and pastoral matters particular to the school. Estates, finance and health and safety remain the province of the main governing body. The changes have brought greater efficiency to the operation, they have made governance more personal to the school, helped to raise the school's profile and ensured that its interests are well understood and represented at full board level.

The governing body is well aware of its responsibilities. Policies and their application are constantly under review to keep abreast of current regulations, particularly in the fields of health and safety, security and child protection. Although finance is dealt with centrally, the policy and

finance committee is meticulous in scrutinising the school's budget proposals before they are presented to the full governing body. The Fairfield academic and planning sub-committee contributes to and monitors the progress of the school development plan. The day-to-day running of the school and the determination of curriculum, teaching and learning and staffing are delegated to the headmaster and his staff but all proposals are discussed thoroughly at sub-committee meetings. The chairman of governors appraises the performance of the headmaster.

The new arrangements have meant that the school and the governors have a much closer relationship than previously. In addition to formal visits for sub-committee meetings twice a year when governors tour the school and meet staff, they receive all school documentation and newsletters and attend events where they meet parents. The presence of the senior management team (SMT) at the sub-committee meetings increases the range of contacts with the school and is a valuable experience for the members of the SMT. On occasion, members of staff make presentations to the sub-committee; for example, the new head of pastoral care outlined her vision for her new post. One initiative which would considerably increase governors' insight into the school would be to spend more time observing pupils in the classroom, an area which is under-developed.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

Leadership and management are excellent throughout the whole school. The headmaster and the senior management team provide clear and decisive direction in all aspects of the school's work. They articulate clearly the school's aims and core purpose and are very successful in achieving them. At all levels, leaders are self-critical, searching constantly for further improvement. Monitoring, evaluation and development planning are outstanding features of leadership and management throughout the school. As a result, the school successfully fulfils its aims, achieving high standards in all areas of activity and in personal development, maintaining, through excellent pastoral care, an ethos in which all are valued equally and the sense of family and community is very strong.

Management structures have been improved and are more effective at all levels. The SMT has been extended; all members have clear responsibilities and carry them out efficiently, setting high standards whilst supporting those for whom they are responsible. Senior managers provide well judged classroom support in language and number and in the guided reading scheme. Academic and pastoral structures are very clear and heads of department and heads of year monitor carefully the areas for which they are responsible.

The school's development plans, both the 10-year plan and the annual plan, are the result of a careful analysis of current performance, including the use of an external audit, and extensive consultation with interested parties, staff, parents and governors. Priorities are clear to all, and all contribute to achieving them. Communication and consultation are very strong; regular meetings at all levels and working parties ensure that all have the opportunity to contribute their ideas. The quality of planning is exemplary. Individual departments draw up their own plans which contribute to the overall plan and indicate how they will respond to whole-school priorities. New initiatives are the subject of careful research, trials and evaluation before they are finally adopted. Policies and procedures covering all aspects of school activity are in place and all are carefully monitored and kept under review.

Staffing ratios are favourable and the well qualified and committed staff are deployed very effectively and often imaginatively. Pupil groupings are varied during the week and extra teachers added to meet specific objectives; senior staff make an important contribution to this flexibility. The selection of new staff and the checking of their qualifications and references are carried out scrupulously, including checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. All the new staff who were interviewed appreciated the induction and support they received.

The school has a well-developed performance management scheme which includes lesson observation and target setting. In an innovative climate, considerable importance is given to staff development and the school has invested substantially in in-service training, priorities being determined by the findings of the staff appraisal process and by the requirements of the development plan.

The overall financial strategy and planning for the future are the province of the main governing body. Financial planning and budgeting procedures for Fairfield are rigorous. Departmental plans, based on an evaluation of the previous year, are costed and carefully scrutinised by a senior manager before being incorporated, after more discussion, into the overall school budgetary plan. The proposals are further scrutinised, and if necessary modified, by the Fairfield sub-committee before submission to the overall governing body. Spending is monitored carefully by the bursary which provides a monthly summary for the school.

The school is very well resourced and in recent years there has been considerable investment in ICT. In-service training and encouragement are leading to more effective and more imaginative use being made of the equipment. The school's own facilities are very good and it gains from the shared use of other facilities with the two senior schools. The new music school, due to open in September, will be a major contribution to the musical life of the school.

On a day-to-day basis, the school runs very smoothly, thanks to capable managers at all levels who pay careful attention to administrative detail and thanks to the efficiency and welcoming presence of the dedicated administrative staff.

The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].

The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

Fairfield Preparatory School meets its aims and aspirations to a high degree. It is an exciting school buzzing with activity and endeavour. It provides broad and wide-ranging experiences, with opportunities for all pupils to achieve their potential. Achievement levels throughout the school are good and sometimes outstanding, not only in academic subjects and success in competitive entry to senior schools but in sport, music and a range of individual and group activities. Pupils emerge remarkably mature and confident and with high personal standards, thanks to the excellent care and support they receive and the attention given to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are rightly proud of their school. Such achievements are due to the outstanding leadership and drive of the headmaster very well supported by senior managers and a very committed staff; they are never satisfied and are always looking for ways to improve.

The school has improved substantially since it was last inspected and has responded very well to the recommendations. In some cases, what were weaknesses are now major strengths such as the provision for ICT and the development of management structures and roles. Standards in all areas have been maintained or improved and the work which is being done in relation to learning support and provision for the gifted and talented is very impressive.

The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

The quality of provision is such that there are no major recommendations. The school should, however, continue the work that it is already doing to provide more open-ended tasks in all areas of the curriculum and to develop assessment procedures for subjects other than English, mathematics and science.

No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspection was carried out from 5th to 8th June, 2006. 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

John Marshall	Retired HMI, Reporting Inspector.
Suzanne Goshawk	Deputy Head, IAPS school.
David Horn	Former Headmaster, IAPS school.
Roger Lawford	Deputy Head, IAPS school.
Peter Lee-Smith	Headmaster, IAPS school.
Jill Moore	Retired Senior Teacher, GSA junior school.