

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL  
(ISC)**

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**INSPECTION OF**

**ST. CATHERINE'S SCHOOL**

**By the**

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE  
(ISI)**

**On**

**9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2006**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### **St. Catherine's School**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Full Name of the School    | <b>St. Catherine's School</b>   |
| DfES Number                | <b>936/6004</b>   |
| Registered Charity Number  | <b>1070858</b>  |
| Address                    | <b>Station Rd, Bramley, Guildford, Surrey GU5 0DF</b>                                       |
| Telephone Number           | <b>01483 893363</b>   |
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| Email Address              | <b><a href="mailto:schooloffice@st.catherines.info">schooloffice@st.catherines.info</a></b> |
| Headmistress               | <b>Mrs Alice Phillips</b>   |
| Head of Preparatory School | <b>Mrs Kathleen Jefferies</b>   |
| Chairman of Governors      | <b>Mr Stuart Sexton</b>   |
| Age Range                  | <b>4 – 18</b>   |
| Gender                     | <b>Female</b>   |
| Inspection Dates           | <b>9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2006</b>                                       |

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 was not carried out in conjunction with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full CSCI report can be found at [www.csci.org.uk](http://www.csci.org.uk).

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.

# CONTENTS

|  | Page      |
|--|-----------|
| <b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>2 THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| The Educational Experience Provided  | 3         |
| Pupils' Learning and Achievements  | 5         |
| Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils                | 8         |
| The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)                             | 11        |
| <b>3 THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS</b>                             | <b>14</b> |
| The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils | 14        |
| The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community                        | 16        |
| The Quality of Boarding Education  | 18        |
| <b>4 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT</b>                    | <b>20</b> |
| The Quality of Governance  | 20        |
| The Quality of Leadership and Management                                   | 20        |
| <b>5 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS</b>  | <b>23</b> |
| Overall Conclusions  | 23        |
| Next Steps   | 23        |
| <b>6 INSPECTION EVIDENCE</b>   | <b>24</b> |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 St. Catherine's School is a day and boarding school for girls between the ages of 4 and 18. It was founded in 1885 by a group of local gentry as a school for 'middle class' girls, providing 'an education of sound and liberal character, including such useful accomplishments as may seem fitting'. Since 1885 the school has developed significantly in terms of numbers, buildings and academic performance and has maintained its Christian foundation.
- 1.2 The school is situated in extensive grounds in the middle of Bramley, near Guildford. At the time of the inspection the school had 818 pupils aged from 4 to 18, with 258 aged 4 to 11 in the preparatory school, 429 aged 11 to 16 in the senior school and 131 in the sixth form. There are currently 139 boarders.
- 1.3 Since the last inspection, in October 2000, the school has undergone a programme of refurbishment and reorganisation and improved its provision and resources. This includes: completion of a three-year re-building and re-furbishing programme of the preparatory school, which has provided new units for Years 5 and 6 and for the pre-preparatory department; maintaining the refurbishment programme in the boarding houses; doubling the number of netball courts; purchasing two new staff houses and land for the development of further lacrosse pitches and a full-size 400m running track; increasing the size of the sixth form; and building closer links with the local community and the village church. The school roll has also increased.
- 1.4 Day pupils come from a wide catchment area and a significant number use coaches run by parents. The school provides four boarding houses.
- 1.5 The main entry ages for the school are 4 and 11. Entry into the preparatory school is by formal and informal assessment and interview during a morning or afternoon visit. At the age of 11, prospective pupils are required to sit entrance examinations in English, verbal reasoning, mathematics and science. A report is also required from the current school of each applicant. At age 16, entry depends on GCSE results, supplemented by a verbal reasoning test, a general paper, an interview and a report from the current school.
- 1.6 Standardised tests in recent years indicate that the average ability of the pupils on entering the school at age 11 is well above the national average. In the preparatory school, pupils' average ability is above that of the national average. If senior school pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results will be well above the average for all maintained secondary schools. If the preparatory school pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results will be above the average for all maintained primary schools.
- 1.7 The school has identified 172 pupils as needing some additional learning support. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. A small minority of pupils do not have English as their principal language.
- 1.8 Most pupils entering Year 7 are from the preparatory school, local maintained primary and preparatory schools. The majority of pupils in Year 11 stay for the sixth form. On leaving the upper sixth, all the pupils proceed to university or further/higher education.
- 1.9 The school aims to provide sound academic teaching, up-to-date facilities and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school encourages each girl to see learning as a way of life and to be committed to independent learning. Regarding each girl as an individual, the

school's philosophy promotes seeing oneself as an individual as well as one of a group and gaining enough confidence to develop fully one's talents and abilities both in and out of the classroom. In keeping with its Christian tradition, Christian values, thoughts and deeds are promoted as is the fostering of pupils' personal, cultural, academic and physical development. The school is committed to providing a safe and healthy school environment, in which pupils can be happy and enjoy education, and to developing a strong partnership between staff and parents.

- 1.10 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school; at times the terms 'lower sixth' and 'upper sixth' are used to refer to Years 12 and 13. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following tables.

***Preparatory School***

| School       | NC name   |
|--------------|-----------|
| Pre-Prep I   | Reception |
| Pre-Prep II  | Year 1    |
| Pre-Prep III | Year 2    |
| Form I       | Year 3    |
| Lower II     | Year 4    |
| Upper II     | Year 5    |
| Lower III    | Year 6    |

***Senior School***

| School    | NC name |
|-----------|---------|
| Upper III | Year 7  |
| Lower IV  | Year 8  |
| Upper IV  | Year 9  |
| Lower V   | Year 10 |
| Upper V   | Year 11 |
| Lower VI  | Year 12 |
| Upper VI  | Year 13 |

## 2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

### **The Educational Experience Provided**

- 2.1 St. Catherine's School provides a rich educational experience for its pupils and prepares them carefully for the different stages of school life and the world beyond. It is outstandingly successful in its aim to provide an all-round education which develops pupils' potential, both academically and socially.

#### ***Preparatory School***

- 2.2 The school provides a high quality of education. The school's aim to encourage pupils 'to see learning as a way of life' is supported through its extensive curriculum. A wide range of subjects and extra-curricular activities contributes successfully to pupils' intellectual, physical and creative development, supporting another of the school's aims to encourage pupils 'to seek opportunities to grow and develop'. Many opportunities are provided to develop pupils' literacy, oracy and numeracy skills. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum has improved since the last inspection. The parental questionnaire reflected a high level of satisfaction with the breadth of the curriculum offered, with one parent commenting that pupils are cared for, nurtured and never pressured, and that there is plenty of time for music, physical education (PE) and dance as well as academic subjects. This view was confirmed in the pupil interviews.
- 2.3 The curriculum is well planned with due emphasis on each of the early learning goals for pupils in Reception. French is taught from Year 3 and the introduction of thinking skills from Year 4 has been welcomed by pupils, one saying 'it helps me see things in a different way; in mathematics, I can use my green hat to make long division fun'. Discrete drama lessons in Years 3 to 6 help the development of spoken language. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme includes a range of age-appropriate issues. ICT is used well to support the curriculum. Planning throughout the school is thorough and detailed with the best outlining learning intentions, activities, assessment, resources and cross curricular approaches. All pupils are able to experience the full curriculum and its supporting activities.
- 2.4 Pupils are prepared well for the next stages of their education. Induction into Reception is carefully handled and Year 6 pupils are taught Latin, geography and design and technology (DT) by senior school teachers. All pupils use the senior school PE facilities and the dining-room, becoming familiar with the senior school environment, and they benefit from using these specialist facilities. Close links exist between senior and preparatory school staff at all levels ensuring effective curricular and pastoral progression.
- 2.5 The curriculum is enriched with a broad range of activities such as an 'Arts Week' for pre-preparatory pupils, fieldwork, pilgrimage walks and activity trips to the science museum and the Isle of Wight. Visitors to the school, lessons in music and Mandarin, ballet and a very wide variety of sports all extend the pupils' knowledge and skills. Pupils enjoy being members of the orchestra, and the choirs are of an excellent standard. Pupils' participation is carefully monitored. Pupils benefit from this strong programme of extra-curricular activity.
- 2.6 Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are suitably supported, and may be withdrawn from lessons for special help if necessary. Teachers are informed about these pupils so that classroom help can be given and individual education plans, appropriate to pupils' needs, are effectively developed to the benefit of these pupils. Parents reflected their

satisfaction with these arrangements. The school is in the process of further developing its provision for very able pupils.

### ***Senior School***

- 2.7 The senior school provides a broad and well balanced education of high quality, fully consistent with its aims and philosophy. The school's commitment to the development of independent learners is supported by an extensive range of subjects and an outstanding choice of extra-curricular activities, which together offer both intellectual and physical challenge. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural values are at the heart of the school and inform all its activity. High standards of behaviour are the norm; pupils are charming and very enthusiastic about the opportunities offered by the school. Their enjoyment of the school is apparent at all ages and in every context.
- 2.8 A full curriculum review took place in 2001-2002, which has resulted in several changes to the timetable, including the introduction of a double period of ICT for all pupils, which leads to Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) certification, a GCSE course in Year 10 and Key Skills in the sixth form. The introduction of 'Thinking Skills' in Year 7 has significantly raised the awareness of learning styles and independent learning strategies have been embedded in all curriculum subjects. The introduction of Greek as an examination subject and Mandarin as an extra-curricular activity provide additional intellectual rigour.
- 2.9 The senior school successfully promotes linguistic, mathematical, scientific, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development, and the acquisition of speaking, listening and numerical skills. Pupils exhibit strengths in all these areas. The introduction of a rotation of the subjects in creative arts in Years 7 to 9 has restored a balance to the curriculum and has resulted in a more even subject choice at GCSE. Pupils have benefited from the parity of teaching time for all modern foreign languages in Years 7 and 8, the earlier and better informed choice for the second language and the freedom to choose any language for GCSE. Girls may choose from a very wide range of subjects at both GCSE and in the sixth form; subjects are offered even if the number of pupils participating is small.
- 2.10 In Years 7 to 9 the teaching groups for English and the humanities are structured to ensure a spread of ability within the range, but also to ensure a mix of houses as well as of day and boarding pupils. Further groupings apply for French, mathematics and science and also for the creative arts rotations. As a result pupils quickly get to know all the other pupils in their year. A well structured PSHE programme is taught in Years 7 to 11, both in designated PSHE lessons and through links across the curriculum.
- 2.11 The provision for those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is very good. All girls are screened on entry to the senior school by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). For some pupils further action may involve a referral to an educational psychologist, individual support lessons or being placed on the monitoring list. Pupils causing concern may be flagged up by any teacher and referred to the SENCO, who draws up an individual education plan and is responsible for recording, monitoring and reviewing progress. The success of pupils with dyslexia in gaining admission to prestigious universities testifies to the effective outcomes of these strategies. Pupils for whom English is not their first language are equally well supported.
- 2.12 The curriculum is well planned with clear opportunity for the personal development of all pupils. It takes into account the very able and those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupils have access to all subjects. The decision to restrict pupils to 9 GCSE

subjects in Year 11 has created timetable space to offer a short course GCSE in ICT and religious studies (RS) and to allow girls time for private study and independent learning. The results of the first cohort of pupils taking nine GCSEs showed a significant increase in A\* grades.

- 2.13 The vast array of extra-curricular activity is undoubtedly a strength of the school and adds significant breadth to the educational experience. The inspection team can testify to the success of the Tante Marie cookery course for sixth formers who provided the inspection team with a delectable dessert on the first evening of the inspection. Some pupils spoke of the difficulty of finding the time to take part in all the activities they would wish, at times necessitating difficult choices to be made: a key life skill. Girls have the opportunity to participate at the very highest level in a wide range of activities both in school, in the UK and abroad, including sport, music ensembles, choirs and drama productions. Lunch timings are arranged to allow priority access for pupils participating in activities and house lunches allow pupils to plan for house competitions.
- 2.14 Pupils' education is also enriched by positive links with the wider community, both locally in Bramley and Guildford, as well as with other schools around the world. The activity week at the end of the summer term enables Year 10 pupils to spend a week in France, Germany or Spain without additional cost. Sixth form pupils enjoy the opportunity to participate in the Paris conference with the theme 'Our future in Europe'. Pupils are well prepared and confident to embark on life after St. Catherine's. Careers advice comes from all sectors of the school community including tutors, teachers and old girls. Upper sixth pupils are well informed about their chosen university courses and could explain in some detail the rationale for their choice. The lower sixth work experience programme provides an exciting opportunity to discover the merits and, in some cases, the demerits of a possible career. In addition sixth form student subject mentors are on hand to advise younger pupils about their subjects at public examination level.
- 2.15 Evidence abounds to support the pupils' appreciation of the education which they receive at St. Catherine's.

### ***Whole School***

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

### **Pupils' Learning and Achievements**

- 2.17 The school's aim to see learning as a way of life is reflected in the effectiveness of the pupils' learning and pupils' notable achievements in their academic and wider education.

### ***Preparatory School***

- 2.18 Pupils of all ages have a thorough knowledge and understanding of their work and have developed skills that enable them to apply their knowledge and understanding, to think critically and creatively, and to work independently. Pupils who need support for their learning make the same good progress as others because of the individual help provided in lessons.
- 2.19 Pupils exhibit good investigative skills: in science, for example, they could understand and apply the principles of fair testing. Their good grasp of facts produces excellent project work, and their ICT skills are confirmed by interactive presentations in geography and researching microbes on the internet. Pupils use their creative talents imaginatively and demonstrate well-developed physical skills in sports and physical education. In Reception,



pupils demonstrate good levels of achievement with the majority attaining the early learning goals. No significant differences in relative attainment between different groups of pupils, subjects or curricular areas were observed.

- 2.20 Results in national testing are significantly high. In the national tests taken at age 7 and 11 the results confirm that pupils' performance is far above the average for pupils in all maintained primary schools. Pupils aged 7 achieved far above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics in the last three years for which comparative data is available, with reading skills being notably high. These results are a considerable improvement from the previous inspection. Pupils aged 11 had similar excellent results in English, mathematics and science. Trends indicate that these standards are maintained over the years.
- 2.21 Pupils also achieve considerable success in activities beyond the curriculum. Pupils from the age of seven achieve high grades in the examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA). Individual and team success is achieved in local and national competitive sports, particularly in biathlon, gymnastics and swimming.
- 2.22 As found in the previous inspection, pupils exhibit well-developed skills for work and study. The school enables pupils to fulfil one of its aims: 'to be happy and enjoy their education'. A parent commented that learning is organised, rigorous and fun. Pupils are very articulate, willingly engage in conversation, ask questions and explain matters clearly. They listen to each other and their teachers courteously. Pupils take pride in presentation and write well for a wide range of purposes and audiences. For example, Year 6 pupils wrote stories for pre-prep pupils, adapting their vocabulary and style to suit the younger audience. Their use of grammar is good.
- 2.23 Pupils have strong mathematical skills, which they use well in other subjects. They measure accurately and present statistical information clearly, embracing ICT as appropriate. Very high standards in music, art and physical education were observed, for instance all pupils in Year 2 were seen to play a stringed instrument and they were delighted with their accomplishments.
- 2.24 Pupils demonstrate good independent working skills and are keen to use their critical thinking skills, particularly in discussion. During thinking skills lessons, pupils showed a strong understanding of how to look at a topic from a variety of viewpoints. Sometimes opportunities for independent learning are missed, for instance when work sheets are heavily used. However, there are many good examples of pupils being able to experiment, think independently and being prepared to 'have a go'; in a science club, pupils were using measuring skills when constructing a paper helicopter whilst discussing air resistance with their partners.
- 2.25 Pupils work very productively together, settling quickly and concentrating closely. Pupils are keen to improve their performance and willingly listen to advice. Reception pupils value the messages left on their work by their teachers. Behaviour is consistently excellent. Pupils enjoy their studies.

### ***Senior School***

- 2.26 Pupils are very well grounded in knowledge and skills and the understanding of subjects and activities provided. In particular the whole-school drive towards independent learning and thinking skills has produced pupils with a marked understanding of their own learning styles,

and with the ability to think creatively. Independent learning and thinking skills are a real strength, deeply embedded in the school culture. This was demonstrated well in a large number of subject areas. In Year 8 drama pupils working on independent character development showed lively, committed and enthusiastic learning. Year 11 biology pupils demonstrated how well they understood the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) structure when they taught each other about genes. Year 9 pupils were prepared to take chances and capitalise on happy accidents when printmaking.

- 2.27 No appreciable differences in relative attainment between different groups of pupils, subjects or curricular areas were noted, although learning and achievement in observed lessons at GCSE was not quite as strong as in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form, where the standard is very good indeed. The work scrutiny across all subjects revealed consistently high achievement. Work was well organised, with progression shown over the year, and enhanced by encouraging marking.
- 2.28 Results are a major success story with consistent progress shown at GCSE and A level. The pupils achieve strongly in public examinations, giving the school consistently high placing in the national league tables. The GCSE performance has been far above the national average and A Level well above the national average for all maintained schools in the last three years for which comparative data is available. The senior school is developing pupil abilities to a high level by its significant emphasis on independent learning. Learning strategies are aiding and developing pupils' skills well for university education.
- 2.29 The house system, which is popular and very well managed, encourages personal and group achievements. The pupils work constructively as groups in a very full range of house competitions. Successful fundraising for charities is the result of activities the pupils devise themselves. The school has an excellent record of results in the creative arts with the ABRSM examinations, the Royal Academy of Dancing certificates, Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts ballet examinations, LAMDA awards and drama and music successes. The A-level theatre studies group recently took their play *Women on Trial* to the Edinburgh Festival. Pupils won a national chamber music competition in 2006, and regularly win prizes at the Godalming and Woking music festivals. Pupils take part in the national 'Youth Drama' competition and the Royal Shakespeare Company's 'Shakespeare in Schools' competition. Girls have exhibited their art and textiles at Guildford Cathedral and have won a national young entrepreneur of the year award in design and technology. Red Cross baby-sitting qualifications are achieved. Pupils take part in biology olympiads, mathematics challenge competitions, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and young enterprise. The school's sporting achievements are remarkable with national performances in several sports including biathlon, netball, gymnastics, lacrosse, swimming and athletics. The netball team are the south-east champions and the 1<sup>st</sup> lacrosse team reached the semi finals of the National Schools' Tournament.
- 2.30 Pupils are exceptionally articulate, yet listen very effectively to the opinions of others, indicative of the courteous nature of the school community. The work scrutiny revealed fluent written work, and extended written work illustrated the gifted pupils' ability to respond well to open-ended tasks, such as the Year 11 history projects on life in the trenches. Year 11 language pupils showed good knowledge of grammatical structures and could identify their own strengths and weaknesses, with Year 12 German pupils confidently using a good range of vocabulary, subordinate clauses and reflexive verbs to argue their case.
- 2.31 Pupils' mathematical and numerical skills are very strong. At all levels progression is observed. Year 8 interpreted graphs well through the application to real life situations, whilst in a Year 9 mathematics lesson use of number cards was effective in learning about

set theory. Year 11 pupils showed strong understanding of the use of simultaneous equations.

- 2.32 Pupils are making effective use of ICT. This has developed well since the last inspection. Display work of Year 7 pupils in history and Year 12 in photography revealed a constructive use of the internet. Year 8 pupils showed excellent knowledge of computer-aided graphics in a magic puzzle design. Lower sixth politics pupils made and took notes on their laptops at the same time as showing a good grasp of the democratic process. Upper sixth classical civilisation pupils enthusiastically used the interactive whiteboard to link archaic architectural sculptures with a timeline.
- 2.33 Pupils reason and argue cogently, and think for themselves. In Year 7 history, pupils animatedly discussed the relative merits of the claimants to the throne in 1066. Independent note-taking is developed from brainstorming and discussion work. Upper sixth pupils revealed a high degree of sophistication in their essays on Jane Austen.
- 2.34 The learning culture of the school means pupils' independent learning and thinking skills develop very well as they progress up the school. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson the library was used to encourage independent learning based on the mathematical section and other library resources, such as puzzles in newspapers. The most able pupils are encouraged to use their independent learning skills to extend their knowledge following the guidelines offered in each subject area. Pupils work co-operatively in groups and clearly enjoy learning both in formal work and activities. The schools' stated aim of 'learning being a way of life' was being fully met in the styles of learning and achievements observed.

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils**

- 2.35 The personal development of the pupils, noted as a strength in the last report, reflects the school's outstanding commitment to this aspect of education. The school's aims in this area are clearly achieved through the pupils' development and readiness to face the challenges of adult life.

#### ***Preparatory School***

- 2.36 Pupils demonstrate an outstanding level of spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding and awareness. The principles of the St. Catherine's 'wheel for life', the whole school mission statement displayed in classrooms and discussed regularly with the pupils, shine through all aspects of school life, as in the headmistress's assembly which extolled care and consideration for others.
- 2.37 With valuable support from the school chaplain and the local parish vicar, pupils are encouraged to participate in chapel services and assemblies and reflect on spiritual topics. A unique programme is in place for Years 3 to 6, enabling the pupils to understand more fully the Christian faith. In consecutive years from Year 3, the pupils learn about a christening, a marriage, a Eucharist and a funeral service. All topics are managed very sensitively and serve to reinforce the Christian ethos that naturally permeates throughout the school.
- 2.38 Pupils learn to value themselves through a variety of channels, including the many opportunities to perform musically, dramatically and athletically. A range of popular choirs and music groups are available as well as developmental squads and teams. Both the music and games programmes endorse the ethos of accessibility for all.
- 2.39 Good manners and behaviour are outstanding. In conversations and in their behaviour around the school, pupils clearly demonstrate that they understand the difference between

right and wrong and their obligations to one another. A Year 3 girl confirmed that 'the main school rule is to be polite'. Staff lead by example and the pupils know that they are valued and respected. Pupils are loyal to their school, polite to visitors and treat each other kindly. The vast majority of the parental responses endorsed this, agreeing that the school developed worthwhile attitudes and views.

- 2.40 Pupils of all ages respond very well to the many opportunities they have to undertake responsibilities and are aware that they are 'putting something back' into their community. Year 6 pupils happily carry out their roles which include heads of houses, leaders of sport and music, monitors and school council members. They feel their responsibility as role models. All girls show initiative and Year 6 pupils feel strongly that their views are not only listened to but acted upon.
- 2.41 Pupils enthusiastically support local and world charities and are encouraged to give assemblies to promote their specific charity. As a result of an initiative which brought together the local infant school, special school and the pre-preparatory department for a Golden Jubilee celebration a few years ago, the pre-preparatory department continues to celebrate 'Arts Week' every two years. Pupils display sound knowledge about the wider world. A news board challenges them with pertinent questions about the world today. In a thinking skills lesson, a lively and wide-ranging discussion was held on the monarchy.
- 2.42 A broad and detailed RS syllabus gives pupils very good insight into world faiths. Pupils are made aware of different cultures by a range of projects and events. Older pupils had developed a three-dimensional display on Judaism and, in the pre-prep, pupils responded keenly to a visitor who showed them typical Russian costumes and dolls from around the world. The PSHE curriculum, which teaches about tolerance and understanding, underpins this outstanding provision.

### ***Senior School***

- 2.43 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding and one of the most striking aspects of the school. Staff and older girls lead by example and the girls leave the school as confident, assured and caring young women.
- 2.44 A strongly spiritual tone, grounded in the Christian tradition of respect for the individual and service to others, pervades school life. The girls are happy and proud to belong to St. Catherine's. Regular chapel attendance aids the integration of the social, moral, spiritual and cultural elements. The chapel is central and is seen by many as a quiet hub within the busily spinning wheel of St. Catherine's. The boarders' service observed was relaxed, relevant and spiritually uplifting. Boarders also attend the local church and take part in celebrations such as the Posada Route, the Spanish religious festival. The local vicar works closely with the school chaplain, who is regarded by the school community as their own parish priest. The services are valued and the vigils run by the chaplain are much appreciated. The girls enjoy the grounds and respect them; even the apples lie undisturbed until the grounds staff remove them!
- 2.45 Moral values are strong and the pupils have a well-developed sense of right and wrong. The school is not cloistered, being prepared to tackle extremely difficult issues in order to equip the girls for what they could meet outside the school. A powerful and valuable lesson on date rape and its effects was observed. Examples of the topics which are included in the preparation for later life, as well as issues which pupils are currently experiencing, can be seen in the autumn term chapel sermons, which cover divorce, health, wealth, family, generosity and contentment. Likewise the PSHE syllabus contains topics such as drugs,

binge drinking and anorexia, which help girls understand 'life' issues. Opinions are discussed and complexities explored.

- 2.46 The positive is always accentuated. The girls are publicly commended for their achievements in such forums as assemblies. However, it is acknowledged that mistakes can be made. This is where the girls attest that they value the supportive environment. Detentions happen but, while success is publicly celebrated with commendations, the wrong doers, who seem to be invariably contrite, are quietly supported and helped to improve.
- 2.47 Pupils' self-knowledge and self-esteem are enhanced by the myriad of activities which are part of St. Catherine's. In the house system the senior girls learn humane, practical leadership, which serves them well in the outside world. All pupils in the sixth form have opportunities for leadership roles within the houses. House spirit is very strong and all pupils become involved regardless of ability or aptitude. Younger girls aspire to become prefects and heads of the school houses, as illustrated by the applications for these positions, having learned the process by being treated with kindness, respect and concern when in Years 7 to 9.
- 2.48 The self-knowledge of the girls is high. They are trained to think for themselves. Many mentioned the 'grey matters' thinking skills course as being extremely valuable. Their self-esteem is enhanced by their complete involvement in the school's life and its activities. The idea of respect is central to the ethos of the school. This extends to the self as well as to others.
- 2.49 Discussions with the girls revealed a high level of social and cultural awareness. Year 9 pupils support elderly people, and a great deal of fund raising and charity work is constantly taking place. Girls are currently preparing for the mufti 'Let Your Hair Down' day for the 'DeBRA' skin disease charity. Through The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme the girls engage in a range of community service activities. Even though they are living in an area which is less multi-cultural than some, pupils are aware of other faiths and cultures, aided by discussion of topics such as 'global issues in our community' or artwork celebrating African culture. There are links with Afghanistan, Nairobi and Australia, and a link co-ordinator is busy developing many more. The fact that London is on the doorstep is well utilized, for example in the visits to London events by the 'culture vultures' club, open to all, not just those studying art, drama and music. Other house-based activities such as art, music and drama are enjoyed. This links back to social awareness and leadership as sixth formers organise the activities, including writing scripts and producing plays. Visiting speakers, including old girls, broaden the girls' world view, aiding cultural development.

### ***Whole School***

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

### **The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)**

- 2.51 The quality of teaching has further improved since the last report and, in keeping with its aim of providing sound academic teaching, is most effective in promoting the pupils' learning and achievements.

#### ***Preparatory School***

- 2.52 The overall quality of teaching is good with a number of examples of outstanding teaching. The school succeeds in providing pupils with a secure understanding and a thorough knowledge of the subjects studied.
- 2.53 Teaching is based on teachers' secure subject knowledge, enabling ideas to be explained clearly. Teachers show a sympathetic understanding of pupils' needs, know their pupils well and are aware of the few pupils who find aspects of the work difficult, providing good support for them. In the early years, teaching assistants were observed giving helpful support to less able pupils. Careful use of graded tasks was seen, particularly with younger pupils, though this good practice is not yet found across the curriculum. The occasional lesson lacked a range of challenge that would enable the most able pupils to work at a level commensurate with their abilities. The recent appointment of a co-ordinator for the gifted and talented confirms the school's commitment to extending further the provision for particularly able pupils. Allied to this, the school has instituted an excellent thinking skills programme of study, which has made pupils more confident in their ability to think things through for themselves.
- 2.54 In most respects teaching is very well planned with clear introductions and sessions at the end where lessons learned are discussed. Outstanding lesson planning was observed in a Year 6 drama lesson, where purposeful planning, combined with engaging and challenging teaching, kept pupils highly motivated as they developed voice technique. A well-chosen range of activities with varied pace in lessons keep pupils well motivated and stimulated.
- 2.55 Pupils' questions were answered knowledgeably and confidently. The pupils know that a wrong answer is not to be feared as the teachers are tireless in their encouragement of pupils. High levels of achievement, for example in music, PE and science, reflect pupils' confidence in their teachers. The scrutiny of Year 6 work revealed high standards of creative writing in English which were the result of skilful instruction in the development of structure, style, accuracy and grammar.
- 2.56 Teachers have access to sufficient, suitable resources which they generally use well. Effective learning is promoted by vibrant and informative classroom displays. Interactive whiteboards provide a stimulating and versatile medium for many lessons. Teachers' ICT skills are developing and, subsequently, the use of ICT is becoming more widely used both by teachers and pupils.
- 2.57 Pupils behave very well indeed due to the excellent rapport that exists between staff and pupils. They respect their teachers and feel that they are fair. The mutual warmth that exists between classes and their teachers is an impressive feature of the school. Pupils co-operate very well with each other.
- 2.58 Pupils receive valuable spoken and written feedback about their work. Praise is widely used. Marking is regular and is characterised by positive comments. Examples of best practice show constructive suggestions for future improvement; however, this is not universal and some marking is still cursory and does not follow the school's marking policy.

- 2.59 The school makes good use of regular assessment to check pupils' progress and set targets for improvement. Outstanding examples of assessment were seen in music and PE. In music, pupils were provided with a minidisc to show their progression in singing and composition.
- 2.60 The school has developed a detailed record of assessment data, particularly in science, mathematics and English, which includes standardised tests referenced to national norms. The school is further developing strategies to use this data to help with future planning of the curriculum.

### ***Senior School***

- 2.61 The overall quality of teaching is good with many examples of excellence. Pupils benefit from very knowledgeable teaching which is enhanced by the enthusiasm of their teachers. Lessons are well planned and planning is responsive to the needs of individual pupils. Teaching enables pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, to acquire new knowledge, make progress according to their ability, increase their understanding and develop their skills.
- 2.62 Teachers display a very good knowledge of their subject, and teach with enthusiasm using a variety of appropriate methods. This enables those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities to make good progress. In a Year 9 geography lesson, by the use of sensitive strategies, the teacher ensured that all pupils were making the required progress. The programme of identifying, at departmental level, exceptionally able or gifted pupils is well established. Pupils for whom English was not their first language are well supported. For example, in lessons where these pupils were present, the teaching was carefully delivered and simple illustrations were used in explanations, so that each student had a good understanding of the content of the lessons.
- 2.63 Teaching fosters in pupils the application of intellectual, physical or creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and work for themselves. Pupils are challenged by staff in lessons through question and answer sessions to think through and articulate their own explanations, rather than be given them by the teacher. The thinking skills classes enable pupils to develop independent thought and to understand the different styles of learning and which methods suit them the best. The results of the whole school initiative to develop pupils as independent thinkers and learners are apparent across the curriculum. Pupils respond very positively to this teaching and learning culture and understand its value to them for life after school.
- 2.64 Teaching is well planned, employing effective teaching methods, suitable activities and efficient management of class time. In a Year 7 chemistry lesson, pupils were presented with a well-paced range of activities including the chance to use themselves as models of the movement of particles in solids, liquids and gases.
- 2.65 In examination classes, teachers will often adjust the planning of future lessons based on the responses by pupils to homework tasks. Teachers produce seating plans to govern pupil interaction in Years 7 to 11. These are regularly reviewed and felt to be a positive initiative by both pupils and their parents.
- 2.66 Teaching shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainment of pupils. It is well suited to this ability range of pupils and often draws on prior knowledge or learning from other curricular areas. For example, sixth form chemistry pupils were able to

contribute knowledge from biology to a discussion on amino acids and pupils in a lower sixth English class recalled their previous knowledge of *Hamlet* for use in a study of *Emma*.

- 2.67 Teachers' expertise and the enthusiasm with which it is communicated to pupils are strengths of the school. The teaching is very well informed and humour is frequently used to enhance lessons, an aspect particularly appreciated by sixth form pupils. Teaching is supported by an adequate quality, quantity and range of resources and makes effective use of them. In a Year 9 geography lesson there was very effective use of interactive whiteboard technology, with the use of video clips and internet websites to aid the teaching of volcanoes. The pace of a Year 11 biology lesson was maintained at a high level by the careful, well prepared use of computer simulation, model building and an interactive presentation on genes.
- 2.68 Teaching includes regular and thorough assessment of pupils' work, information from which is used to plan teaching so that pupils can progress. Work is regularly marked, according to individual departmental marking policies, with supportive comments and suggestions to enable pupils to make further progress. Some departments, for example the sciences, indicate to pupils when a particular difficulty is one shared by other pupils and that clarification is planned for a future lesson. This helps to reduce the worries that pupils may develop around the lack of understanding of a topic.
- 2.69 Teaching encourages pupils to behave responsibly. Pupils are encouraged to discuss work maturely and sensitively in the classroom. Observed lessons confirmed very good relationships between teachers and pupils, and between pupils themselves. Pupils are unfailingly courteous in lessons and appreciative of the inputs of fellow pupils to class discussions.
- 2.70 The school has developed an assessment policy to evaluate pupils' performance by reference to the school's own aims. This new scale of assessment was used successfully in the end of year examinations in summer 2006. It is intended by senior management that it will be used with departmental assessments of pupils across the curriculum, in order to ensure parity of esteem for all subjects and to give a clear indication of assessed levels to parents. The school plans that this new system will be integrated into departmental assessment policies during this school year.
- 2.71 Standardised testing is undertaken against national norms. The resulting data is disseminated to heads of department who use it to inform their planning for pupils and to provide a baseline for evaluating the overall progress made.

### ***Whole School***

- 2.72 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 Pastoral care was recorded as a strength in the last inspection and it continues to be a major strength of the school, confirming the school's aim to provide individual care and support.

##### ***Preparatory School***

- 3.2 The care of the pupils in the preparatory school is outstanding. The staff provide highly effective support and guidance for all pupils and this permeates the whole of school life. Pupils feel secure in a caring environment and pupils say they are treated kindly and fairly. Staff know their pupils very well and are skilled at nurturing their individual and group talents as well as showing an interest in their lives beyond the school as well as when under their care.
- 3.3 Very clear policies and guidelines and staff discussion enable the effective sharing of pastoral issues across the school. 'Pupils for concern' is the first item on the staff meeting agenda every week. All pupils are in tutor groups and all staff, including teaching assistants and secretarial staff, look after a group. The tutor groups meet twice each half term to discuss personal and social issues, thus allowing further opportunity for pupils to meet others in different year groups. By this means, pupils have another adult as a reference point should they need it, and staff get to know a small group of girls very well.
- 3.4 Measures to promote good and responsible behaviour focus on encouragement and positive reinforcement. PSHE lessons provide a structured and rich programme of study as part of an evolving five-year plan. In these sessions pupils are able to discuss a myriad of social, moral and ethical matters. Visitors to the school are invited to speak to the pupils to reinforce discussion that has taken place in the classroom.
- 3.5 Pupils were consulted in the writing of the St. Catherine's 'Wheel for Life', the whole school mission statement, displayed in classrooms and discussed regularly with the pupils. New pupils are shadowed to ensure a smooth and happy transition into school life. Pupils respond very well to the range of rewards such as stickers and house points which are awarded for academic effort and showing initiative and kindness towards others. Achievements are celebrated in assemblies during which certificates are presented.
- 3.6 The quality of relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils is excellent. Pupils relate very well to each other. They were observed listening courteously to one another's contributions in class discussion and were co-operative when undertaking paired or group work. Anti-bullying measures are clearly in place but are rarely needed as pupils are so kind and helpful to each other and spontaneously celebrate each other's personal and team achievements. 'Thought boxes' in every classroom provide pupils with the opportunity to thank another pupil for a kind word or action, or to share a concern for which the whole class can provide support. These positive relationships provide optimal learning conditions.
- 3.7 The school is vigilant about the health, safety and welfare of its pupils and procedures in these areas are kept under regular review. Parents commenting in the parents' questionnaire said there was an 'excellent standard of care'. Menus are based on healthy eating and school lunches are popular. Thorough risk assessments in all areas of school life are carried out and regularly reviewed. Health and safety meetings occur termly and effective procedures for child protection are in place, with all staff being appropriately trained. The preparatory

school has a substantial number of staff trained in first aid and makes use of the school's medical centre.

- 3.8 All necessary measures have been taken to minimise the risk of fire and evacuation procedures are practised termly. Diagrams with written and visual instructions about the evacuation of the school are displayed in every classroom.
- 3.9 The school is a real 'community', with a strong team of staff working together for the welfare and support of the pupils. The pupils in turn are happy and proud of their school.

### ***Senior School***

- 3.10 The staff care highly effectively for all pupils' well-being and development, and are supported in this by appropriate structures.
- 3.11 The girls receive outstanding support as a result of the house system and, since the last inspection, this has been augmented by a specialist tutor for Year 7, enabling pupils to settle into senior school life as quickly as possible. The vertical groupings of the house system allow the girls to mix with other year groups and this provides a sense of 'family'. The house system is complementary to the boarding system. As one pupil recorded 'this school also emphasises the importance of friends to turn to if you have a problem, not only adults'. The popularity of the house system is reflected in the healthy competition for girls to achieve positions such as prefect and house captain.
- 3.12 The girls' well-being is at the centre of all school activities. In the staff briefing, school housemistresses' meetings and boarding housemistresses' meetings pupils' needs are always at the forefront of discussions, as seen in the minutes of these meetings. In each case a structured action plan is put in place. Staff are aware of the needs of each pupil, and it is evident throughout school life that pupils are cared for as individuals.
- 3.13 Many other support networks are in place, for both staff and pupils. The medical centre, employing four nurses and the school doctor who is on site one day each week, provides full cover both day and night. The nursing team organises first aid training for all relevant staff. All accidents are recorded and procedures for prevention of accidents are robust. The chaplain not only has a key role in the chapel, but also has pastoral input with pupils and staff. Services in chapel explore important issues relevant to the girls, as does the PSHE programme. The senior housemistress is qualified in counselling, which adds to the support network. Staff play a main part in supporting the girls at house events, and many are involved in overseeing study and boarding duties.
- 3.14 The relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils are outstanding. The caring Christian ethos pervades all areas of school life. The girls feel that they can turn to anyone for help, particularly their form tutors. One girl said: 'all staff care about us'. They are taught to look after each other and there is a system in place for Year 8 girls to shadow Year 7 girls until they have settled in. The housemistresses and house captains demonstrate an enthusiastic approach to encourage all girls to participate in activities.
- 3.15 Girls are praised publicly for their effort, good behaviour and success in all areas of school. This is also seen in the merits and commendations at house meetings. All girls are proud of their house badges and colours which they can earn in many different activities. Girls who misbehave are dealt with quietly and this is not over publicised. The girls are clear about the sanctions but say that 'only a few girls ever get into trouble'. Pupils and staff are very aware of the anti-bullying policy.

- 3.16 There is a comprehensive set of policies in place to protect pupils. All staff are well briefed in pastoral support and are aware of the procedures to follow in case of problems. All staff are trained in child protection procedures and a comprehensive set of risk assessments covers all areas in and beyond school.
- 3.17 Fire practices are held each term and the details monitored carefully in the health and safety meetings. Recruitment checks on all staff are thorough. A comprehensive set of health and safety documents, policies and risk assessments is in place for all activities. The school has a workable policy on disability arrangements which complies with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA). The girls are highly complimentary about the standard of food in school, which is nutritionally well balanced. Pupils are aware that there is plenty of advice on healthy eating, both from the medical centre and in the curriculum.
- 3.18 One parent reported that this school is caring, professional and highly competent, that it does not mollycoddle but prepares the girls for the future, and another commented that the school has a wonderful caring approach where children can develop and grow in a very stimulating environment.
- 3.19 The girls at St. Catherine's take great pride in their school, and are eloquent advocates for the school and its care of them.

#### ***Whole School***

- 3.20 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**

- 3.21 Links with parents and the community were noted as strong at the last inspection and, since then, the school has been even more committed to its aims in this area with the result that the links are even stronger to the benefit of pupils, parents and the wider community.

#### ***Preparatory School***

- 3.22 The school has forged extremely effective partnership with parents who much appreciate the warm, welcoming family atmosphere of the school. Parents who were interviewed went out of their way to praise the headmistress's clear and determined lead in making herself available to see parents at short notice.
- 3.23 Parents who responded to the questionnaire were very satisfied with the teaching, the curriculum provided, the promotion of worthwhile attitudes and values, and the very good range of extra-curricular activities.
- 3.24 Parents have many opportunities to be involved in the life of the school. Reading record books and homework diaries provide an easy and effective means of contact between home and school. A very effective and supportive parents' and teachers' association (PTA) includes representatives from each year group. In addition, highly effective 'Focus Evenings', including a cross-section of parents from the prep and senior schools, are regularly held to enable the representation of parental views to the two headmistresses. Parents are actively involved in the library with over thirty parents, the 'Bibliocats', making the library very accessible. Parents are involved in many other ways, including drama productions, where they help make costumes and props.

- 3.25 Parents are very pleased with the wealth of written information. The *Girls' Handbook* is provided to new pupils and their parents. The excellent *Cat's Eyes* newsletter reports fortnightly on recent and future events as well as pupils' achievements, and includes selections of the pupils' work, such as poetry. The impressively designed and informative school website is a useful communication tool for parents and the wider community. The school and the PTA hold a special welcome session for parents new to the school. Parents benefit from three parents' evenings a year as well as written reports. The written reports are of high standard and contain detailed information about work covered and suggestions for improvement. They are clearly tailored accurately to the individual child. As two parents confirmed, the teachers know their pupils exceptionally well. Along with a wealth of informal contact, this means that parents are kept fully up to date with their children's work and progress. The parents' questionnaire responses confirm that the school handles issues of concern with due care and without unnecessary delay.
- 3.26 The school has worked hard and successfully to create meaningful links with the local community and this is an area that has developed in recent years. Pupils in the pre-preparatory department are actively involved in a local 'Arts Week' so that pupils interact with children from the local infants and special schools. Very good links exist with the local parish church and it is used by RS classes as part of their studies on the 'rites of passage'. Older pupils visit the senior citizens' day centre.
- 3.27 Charities are strongly supported: local (support for the homeless in Guildford), national (a spinal trust charity) and international (support of the Asian tsunami victims). Pupils make suggestions as to the appropriate choice of charities. The commitment to charity work was exemplified by some pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 who took part in a sponsored 'sleep out' in cardboard boxes in the school's courtyard as part of their drive to raise money for the homeless. The school's aim for its pupils to show care and consideration for others is admirably fulfilled.

### ***Senior School***

- 3.28 Parents are extremely satisfied with the education and support provided for their children. A high percentage of parents responded to the questionnaire prior to the inspection. Almost all felt the school promoted worthwhile attitudes and values, provided a good range of subjects and extra-curricular activities, offered teaching that enabled their child to make progress and achieved high standards of behaviour. Two parents interviewed said they could not have wished for a better school for their daughters. They felt that teachers knew their daughters very well, expanded their horizons and taught them to manage their time and workload. These parents said that the level of interest shown by staff in the pupils was a special feature of the school.
- 3.29 Parents have excellent opportunities for involvement in the school and in the work and progress of their children. The PTA works hard to provide social interaction between parents and the school and also raises funds for projects with direct benefits for the girls, for example the refurbishment of the dining hall including a new sound system. Both PTAs liaise effectively and support each other. PTA lectures for parents are highly successful, a recent example being for fathers on female learning styles, attended by around two hundred parents. Many social events throughout the year enable parents to be fully involved in the life of the school. Bringing parents into school to experience lessons and activities for themselves has proved especially successful. Excellent communication with parents is fostered through termly focus groups covering all aspects of school life. An impressive innovation has been the establishment of the St. Catherine's Association which now very successfully embraces the two schools, their PTAs, the old girls, governors, former staff,

past parents, friends and members of the local community. This inclusive organisation is a further inducement for parental involvement and another channel for the communication of ideas.

- 3.30 Parents are provided with a wealth of information regarding the school, their daughters and their achievements. The *Parents' Handbook* is an excellent introduction to the school, replete with detailed practical information. The frequently published newsletter, *The Wheel*, keeps parents up to date with recent and future events. It now usefully includes key dates of important events for the term ahead, an idea raised at a focus group meeting. The website provides a wealth of information. Other regular publications, including the termly calendar, the annual information booklet and the school magazine ensure that parents are fully informed. The combination of regular parents' evenings and written reports provides a flow of information on pupil progress throughout the year. It is very good practice that the parents of boarders receive extra reports in lieu of attending parents' evenings. Reports are detailed and thorough and the practice of girls reading through their reports and discussing them with tutors is greatly appreciated by the girls and their parents. The inclusion of self evaluation and target setting sheets in the reports for senior girls fosters independence and responsibility.
- 3.31 Parental concerns are dealt with very efficiently and rapidly, with the senior management team kept informed of any potential issues through the use of the pupil/parent contact form. This high level of care ensures issues are rectified in the early stages and are not allowed to develop. It is a testament to the caring approach of staff and well structured systems that the formal complaints file remains empty. The school's clear complaints procedure has not been needed.
- 3.32 The school's aim, that 'our pupils should have access to the wider world in which they live, be encouraged to be informed about it and to feel part of it', is being achieved by a variety of means. Pupils have insight into the global community through impressive links with schools in Afghanistan and Australia, and by house charity fundraising for a Nairobi school. Pupils' global awareness is enriched by a wide range of expeditions and travel or project bursaries much appreciated by the girls. The school, energetically led by the headmistress, has forged many links with the local community, whereby pupils develop their sense of service through The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme work with a local special needs school and a reading support programme for a primary school. Links with the parish church are particularly strong with pupils contributing to services and other aspects of the church's work. Pupils share their skills in the arts with the Guildford public through concerts and exhibitions in the cathedral and drama in the theatre. The revival of visits to the school by senior citizens from the Peckham settlement in London further encourages pupils' commitment to the world outside St. Catherine's.

### ***Whole School***

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

### **The Quality of Boarding Education**

- 3.34 The quality of the boarding experience at St. Catherine's very strongly supports boarders' education and development. The last report confirmed the success of the boarding life of the school and the high quality of current boarding provision, together with the increase in boarding numbers, confirm the school's aim to develop fully pupils' talents and abilities

both in and out of the classroom. Boarders and their parents confirm how much it is valued and how much it contributes to the personal development of each individual boarder.

- 3.35 Boarders sum up the quality of their boarding experience by saying how much they feel trusted and encouraged to make decisions about the use of their time, whilst adhering to the traditions of the boarding community. A parent confirmed this by commenting that boarding is excellent, with an appreciation for the way girls are initially nurtured during the first year of boarding and then slowly encouraged to become self-sufficient.
- 3.36 The quality of pastoral care in all boarding houses is outstanding, typified both by the structured way in which the housemistresses meet on a weekly basis to consider all boarding issues and by the pupils' expressions of respect for their housemistresses who they acknowledge to be very open with their charges and support them in a parental way. Boarders find their housemistresses 'not intrusive but supportive'. A parent confirmed the commitment from the boarding staff, commenting that for overseas parents of a full time boarder, there is great appreciation of both the pastoral and practical support for their daughter.
- 3.37 Boarders have a positive impact on the school community and make a significant contribution to the academic, cultural and sporting life of the school. Sixth form boarders, in particular, are acknowledged as some of the key leaders of the school, managing a range of school events and acting as role models.
- 3.38 Relationships between the boarders, of all ages, are very good. The atmosphere within the houses is lively, warm and supportive with pupils saying how much they value each others' company at all ages. A striking comment from a boarder goes beyond this: 'boarding has taught me to relate to people who, otherwise, I would not have chosen to meet; it has taught me the vital social skill of getting along with other people'.
- 3.39 Boarders report that they have a good range of activities. After the school day ends they value being able to use all the school facilities and further develop their skills in music, art, drama and sport. Boarders speak highly of the quality and range of weekend activities and of the quality of the food, especially breakfast and supper. Boarders also confirm that they feel academically supported by the boarding staff, who go out of their way to reinforce academic development.
- 3.40 Boarding accommodation is very good and the boarders are well aware of the rolling programme of refurbishment to ensure that both the décor and the facilities are of the highest standards. This involvement of boarders in the development of their houses confirms the trusting partnership between pupils and staff which is a hallmark of the school as a whole.

#### **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

##### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 Highly effective government and management deliver an outstanding quality of education.
- 4.2 The governors are wholly committed to the school's ethos and traditions but also to its development for the benefit of future generations of pupils. The structure of the governing body with its six supporting sub-committees contributes significantly to the effectiveness of governance. To ensure consistency of purpose between the school and the governing body, a number of senior managers sit on the various committees, and middle managers are invited to contribute to the deliberations of the academic committee in particular.
- 4.3 The development plan for all areas of the school has been carefully drawn up and is regularly revised. In recent weeks the school has issued to parents and supporters of the school the public version of this plan, a most attractive brochure entitled *A Vision for the Future*. It is in keeping with the governors' oversight of the school that recipients of this brochure are invited to respond to it and all responses are being carefully logged.
- 4.4 The chairman is aware of the key skills needed on the governing body and identifies new governors with these skills who will contribute to the future developments of the school. Indeed, continuity of expertise on the governing body is a key aim. New governors receive governor training, which includes attending the school's 'Prospective Parents' Mornings'. The articles of governance, including the terms of reference for each committee, have been carefully drawn up, indicating commitment to legal compliance.
- 4.5 The chairman of governors visits the school regularly and governors attend many functions where they are able to discuss current issues with staff, pupils and parents. The governors are kept informed about the school through their support of school events, by their committee reports and by the termly reports of the headmistresses of both the senior and the preparatory schools. These reports are very thorough and inform the governors about all aspects of the school. In their turn, the governors are appreciative of the unstinting commitment of the headmistresses and do all they can to support them. The governors' work is supported by tight financial control and careful management of resources.

##### **The Quality of Leadership and Management**

- 4.6 Leadership and management were seen as strong in the last report. These areas have further improved with the strengths being reflected in the purposeful partnership between the headmistresses in the best interests of both schools and their high level of awareness of what is needed for the future development of St. Catherine's.

##### ***Preparatory School***

- 4.7 Leadership and management are highly successful and fully support the school's aims, with particular emphasis on that of showing care and consideration for others. They promote excellent pastoral care, spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments and links with parents. This was summed up by a parent whose daughter had had a 'wonderful education at the preparatory school, taught by caring teachers and provided with a full, broad curriculum'.



- 4.8 The commitment of the preparatory school headmistress is reflected in her excellent leadership contributing to the high quality of education and care of the pupils. She is very well supported by a highly effective senior management team. They provide clear educational direction for the school and inspire high staff morale and confidence as evinced by many of the curriculum co-ordinators. This is also the experience of parents who say that the head of the preparatory school is a superb motivator and has created a wonderful atmosphere for learning and development.
- 4.9 The headmistress and her team are effective in analysing the school's needs, setting priorities, planning to meet those priorities, and putting decisions into practice. Policies and curriculum plans are carefully framed, are reviewed annually and new targets are set. Pupils' work and assessments in many subjects are carefully examined and issues identified are used to develop further the curriculum.
- 4.10 Teaching and classroom support staff are deployed effectively, and contribute significantly to pupils' learning and welfare. All support fully the very caring ethos of the school. Staff development is exceptionally carefully monitored and staff training needs are identified and met with appropriate courses and in-service training. ICT training provided by the school leads to a recognizable qualification. Suitable arrangements are in place for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and the caring support provided has been appreciated.
- 4.11 Resources are good and are well used to support learning and teaching. For instance the interactive whiteboards have been fitted with steps to ensure that younger pupils have safe access to this facility. The accommodation is very efficiently maintained and includes some well-equipped specialist areas, such as the ICT, art and science rooms and very good facilities for physical education. Display work throughout the school enhances the quality of learning and the pupils appreciate the interactive displays. Procedures for budgeting operate most efficiently.
- 4.12 The administration of the preparatory school is efficient. The wealth of administrative and other support staff provide appropriate assistance, upon which the efficiency of the running of the school depends.

### ***Senior School***

- 4.13 Leadership and management are highly effective in all areas of the school, which is one of the main reasons why St. Catherine's has made a significant leap forward since the last inspection. The school's aims and ethos are recognised as reality in a parental comment from the questionnaire that they are satisfied with the school and that it manages to achieve high academic standards, excellent pastoral care and very happy, relaxed girls in a caring environment. A parent commented that 'the headmistress is excellent; a great leader, yet approachable'.
- 4.14 The leadership's commitment to independent learning, encouragement to pupils to face the realities of life, and its support of staff are significant qualities. These qualities are also replicated in many of the supporting staff.
- 4.15 The headmistress has developed a senior management team, who have clearly defined roles in different areas of the school, work very positively together and strongly support the school's ethos and aims. Development of this team is carefully monitored by the headmistress and the recent key appointment of the school administrator has been warmly welcomed by the school as a whole. The close working relationship between the heads of the two schools is a key management strength, reflected in their joint speech at the last prize-



giving on their vision for the schools' future. The joint senior and preparatory schools' senior management team meeting contributes to positive liaison between the two schools. The complementary support systems of the school houses, the boarding houses and the tutor team are well integrated and contribute to a much admired and valued network of pastoral and academic care.

- 4.16 The heads of department play a strong management role. They feel they have been given the autonomy to run their departments in line with school policy, but that, with this autonomy, is strong interest and support from the senior management team. They feel respected by the headmistress as experienced practitioners but also key players in the further academic development of the school. Heads of department are committed to the management of their departments and are responsible for many areas including appraisal, in-service training and career development. New staff are carefully appointed and are then supported and motivated through induction and mentoring. The school is committed to supporting NQTs and teachers in training, and manages their programmes with care.
- 4.17 A particular strength of the management is the quality and organisation of the written documentation. Policies are well developed and regularly revised. A range of meetings is held each week at both school and departmental level. At school level all meetings are minuted by a member of the administrative team, thus allowing staff to discuss freely the matters of the moment and concentrate on people rather than paper.
- 4.18 The school is well supported by careful financial management which ensures the supply of a good range of resources and suitable premises and accommodation. The quality of the recent development of new facilities for the preparatory school and the overall quality of the campus and buildings confirms this. The school also benefits from committed and motivated support staff who enhance the pupils' educational opportunities by the high quality care of the buildings and grounds, the provision of appetising and healthy meals and range of other support services.

#### ***Whole School***

- 4.19 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.20 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 The school is outstanding in key areas and eminently successful in fulfilling its aims.

### **Overall Conclusions**

- 5.2 St. Catherine's achieves a very high level of academic results for its pupils and this is the outcome of a strong and committed teaching staff who offer challenge to pupils, the school's commitment to independent learning and an equal commitment to educating the whole person. The school's excellent provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education permeates the life of the school. Pastoral care at St. Catherine's cannot be rated too highly and this is confirmed by both the pupils and their parents. The school offers pupils a wonderful activities programme of which they are rightly proud and which they support in very large numbers. The boarding life of the school is exceptional. Educational provision, in the full sense of those words, is outstanding because, above all, St. Catherine's is a learning school in which a state of satisfaction with anything but the best is not on the agenda. As pupils are stimulated to be independent learners and thinkers, so the management of the school continually seeks ways of improving the educational provision.
- 5.3 Since the last ISI inspection report, the school has made significant strides both in the quality of education offered and in the developments of its facilities. In both schools, the two recommendations of the last report have been met. The recommendations of the last boarding welfare inspection by CSCI have received positive attention in the best interests of the boarding pupils. The last Ofsted report on the nursery made no recommendations.
- 5.4 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

### **Next Steps**

- 5.5 The school is encouraged in its commitment to develop further its strategies for:
1. the use of ICT in teaching linked to its programme of staff training;
  2. the recording and monitoring of all pupil assessment.
- 5.6 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

## 6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> October 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, chapel services and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

### List of Inspectors

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Adrian Underwood          | Reporting Inspector                       |
| <i>Senior School</i>      |   |
| Olivia Boyer              | Head of Department, HMC school            |
| David Callender           | Headteacher, IAPS school                  |
| Marilyn Cass              | Headmistress, GSA school                  |
| Barry Gillions            | Second Master, HMC school                 |
| Janet Mark                | Headmistress, GSA school                  |
| Nicola Matthews           | Deputy Head, GSA school                   |
| <i>Preparatory School</i> |   |
| Sara Wiggins              | Assistant Reporting Inspector             |
| Anne Farnish              | Head Designate, ISA school                |
| Brian Melia               | Headmaster, IAPS school                   |
| Kate Mitchell             | Head of the Junior Department, GSA school |

