

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

St Benedict's School

The junior school was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of the School	St Benedict's School
DCSF Number	307/6006
Early Years Number	N/A
Registered Charity Number	242715
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Head	Mr Christopher Cleugh
Chairman of Governors	The Rt Revd Martin Shipperlee OSB
Age Range	11 to 18
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	9th to 12th November 2009

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009.

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 St. Benedict's is the only Benedictine day school in Britain. Its mission, 'teaching a way of living', is to be realised through commitment to the essential characteristics of the Benedictine way of life. The school's objective is to develop young men and women who will aspire to success at school and beyond, understand and live by gospel values, be happy in their personal and family lives, make a distinctive contribution to society and take with them, throughout their lives, a sense of belonging to the community of St Benedict's and that they have 'learned how to live'.
- 1.2 Founded as a boys' school in 1902 by monks from Downside Abbey, the school is now a part of the Ealing Abbey Trust and is governed by the Abbot and monks of Ealing, supported by an advisory board of lay people. Girls have been admitted to the sixth form since the 1970s and the school became fully co-educational from September 2008. The school site, in a pleasant West London suburb, is alongside the monastery, which became an independent community in 1947, achieving abbey status in 1955. The junior school, catering for some 300 pupils below the age of 11, occupies part of the same site. It was inspected at the same time as the senior school and is the subject of a separate report.
- 1.3 The present headmaster has been in post since January 2002. The most significant change since the last inspection in 2004 has been the decision to embark on the transition to full co-education. The number of pupils has increased by just over ten percent. A significant investment in facilities and resources has resulted in the refurbishment of the laboratories, the library and the art and design department. A new pavilion has been built at the sports ground and an extensive redevelopment of the heart of the school has provided a school chapel, new accommodation for modern languages and music, a reception area and a large open area which, although of modern construction, takes its inspiration from monastic cloisters and can be used flexibly, including for display, rehearsals and school assemblies.
- 1.4 The senior school caters for boys and girls aged 11 to 18. At the time of the inspection there were 684 pupils in the school; 556 boys and 128 girls, including 142 boys and 38 girls in the sixth form. Entry to the senior school at age 11 follows entrance tests in English, mathematics and verbal reasoning and an interview. Baptised members of the Roman Catholic Church are given some preference in the selection process, which also recognizes family links and the candidate's previous school record. Small numbers are admitted at age 13 or, occasionally, at other stages dependent on vacancies becoming available. Such entrants have to demonstrate their ability to fit into the year group. Entry to the sixth form is dependent on an interview, the candidate's school record and the achievement of at least 6 GCSE passes at grade B or better, including English, mathematics and the subjects to be studied for A level. Scholarships are awarded on the basis of exceptional performance in the entrance tests.
- 1.5 Scores in standardised tests taken on entry to the school indicate that the average ability of pupils in the school is well above the national average. Where pupils are performing in line with their abilities their examination results are expected to be well above the average achieved nationally by boys in all maintained schools (it being most appropriate to make the comparison with boys' results because the change to full co-education was so recent).
- 1.6 The pupils come from a variety of economic, religious and ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the school's west London location; about 60% are Roman Catholic. Just under half of the entry at age 11 comes from the junior school, with the remainder coming from a variety of other maintained and independent junior schools. Only 11 pupils come from families that do not

have English as their principal language, and none require English language support. Four pupils in the school have a statement of special educational needs. The school has identified a further 124 pupils, 89 classed as *School Action* and 35 as *School Action Plus* using the national code of practice, as having a recognised learning difference or disability, mostly dyslexia, of whom 71 receive specialist learning support.

- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following table.

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

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 St Benedict's provides a good quality and distinctively Catholic educational experience. The Benedictine ethos, way of life and the school's essential aim of 'teaching a way of living' are clear, consistently expressed through the life of the school and publicly celebrated at every opportunity. The balance between the successful attainment of good academic results through the pursuit of excellence in learning and an extensive exposure to a wide range of cultural, spiritual and sporting activities is well calibrated. The curriculum provided is rich and provides a range of educational opportunities well suited to the interests, aptitudes and needs of all pupils. Overall, the educational experience provided has been significantly strengthened since the time of the last inspection with an improved curriculum, stronger teaching and a clearer commitment to the school's mission. Pupils and staff are highly supportive of the school's aims, living their lives in synergy with the Benedictine ethos and celebrating its virtues.
- 2.2 The formal curriculum, together with the extremely broad programme of co-curricular activities, contributes fully to the linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social development of all pupils, as well as to a high standard of physical engagement. The provision of art, design and technology (ADT) across all year groups in the school since the last inspection has enhanced curricular opportunities for pupils' aesthetic and creative development. All pupils are encouraged to communicate fluently and precisely. They listen intently, not only to their teachers but also to each other, and retain and use information with precision and accuracy. The literacy and numeracy skills acquired by pupils are of a high standard and support fully all that they do.
- 2.3 Pupils' experience of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) reflects the school's aims and ethos, although the way in which this is provided, through other subjects and some specially arranged sessions, makes the monitoring of content and coverage for all pupils difficult. The school recognises this in its improvement plan. The education provided is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, useful links with the community, some good possibilities to engage in community service and appropriate encouragement to undertake work experience. The St Vincent de Paul Society enables those pupils who are members to be involved in practical community service, which includes working with a soup kitchen and with people with severe learning disabilities at a local Mencap branch, although below the sixth form the focus is mainly on fund raising. An annual pilgrimage to Lourdes allows those pupils who participate to experience challenging and worthwhile work in support of the seriously sick or disabled. Other service activities include a well supported Combined Cadet Force (CCF), opportunities to work towards Duke of Edinburgh awards and the chance to be involved in the work of the charities committee. The lunch break enables pupils to take part in myriad creative and intellectual activities, including origami, debating, drama, a vast range of music ensembles and creative writing.
- 2.4 Sixth form pupils receive valuable individual advice on higher education and, if appropriate, are given interview practice before they meet university admission tutors. Currently, the school provides very limited careers information and advice for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and is aware of the need to develop careers provision throughout the school. Work experience or work shadowing opportunities are available to pupils in Year 11 through the careers department, and further work experience provision can be made for pupils in the sixth form. Although the sixth-form curriculum is extended beyond the confines of A-level courses by a good variety of talks and visits, these are usually focused for particular interest groups and so do not systematically provide either intellectual enrichment or preparation for adult life for

all pupils. However, pupils throughout the sixth form do benefit from a continuing general course of religious studies, giving them good opportunity to reflect on their values and beliefs before leaving school.

- 2.5 The curriculum is effectively planned and kept under constant review. It provides good equality of access for all pupils and promotes a high level of participation in a wide range of activities. The detailed planning that took place in preparation for the introduction of co-education throughout the school exemplified the school's commitment to ensuring equal access and good participation for all its pupils. The range and quality of the extra-curricular activities are outstanding and activities are well supported by staff and pupils alike. Sporting opportunities are extensive. The boys' and girls' games fixture lists are challenging for the size of the school and the record of success indicates that the challenge is well met, resulting in a school that has a well-deserved national reputation on the rugby field. Additional teams in each year group allow added opportunities to represent the school in competition in a range of sports and at a variety of levels, while the inter-house sports programme further extends the opportunity for participation. The fitness suite is very well equipped and extensively used. The school's extra-curricular facilities are open during the lunch break, after school and, often, at weekends, for example, when preparing for drama productions.
- 2.6 The learning support programme provides well for those with particular learning needs and ensures that all pupils are enabled to benefit fully from their time in the school and develop their potential. Provision for pupils who have a statement of special educational need is characterised by unobtrusive support, tailored to match their needs. Pupils identified as being particularly gifted and talented receive appropriate extension work and opportunities for accelerated learning in a number of subjects, including mathematics and games. The school is accessible for those with physical disability and they are enabled to participate in the full programme, including representing the school in sports fixtures.
- 2.7 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.8 Pupils are highly competent and willing learners who achieve well in their subjects and activities and are well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding. Attainment is consistently good throughout the school, across all ability groups and curriculum areas and is better than was reported at the last inspection. Pupils' learning is particularly strong in terms of their attitude and motivation. They apply their skills effectively and with persistence in lessons and are capable of independent thought and reasoning. Although proficient and sometimes highly skilled in the use of information and communications technology (ICT), they under-employ this skill in their lessons.
- 2.9 Pupils are articulate and confident speakers. They listen attentively in lessons and maintain focus and concentration, behaving well in class and around school. The presentation of written work is of a high standard. The pupils demonstrate good ability to think creatively and critically, as was evident from their questioning, debating and intellectual reasoning. Some are skilled users of ICT. In a graphic design lesson, pupils in Year 8 manipulated and altered images using a range of software tools to create a soft drinks carton, and in an English lesson pupils in Year 11 produced high calibre posters using composite images and symbols from the internet.
- 2.10 The relative attainment of girls and boys is carefully monitored by the school but the disparity in the numbers of boys and girls at this early stage of co-education means that it is too soon to draw conclusions.

- 2.11 Achievement in public examinations is good. During the three years to 2008, the latest for which national comparative data was available at the time of the inspection, results at GCSE were well above the average obtained nationally by boys in all maintained schools and in line with those achieved in maintained selective schools. Results at GCSE are good in relation to the pupils' abilities. Standardised measures of progress indicate that pupils make progress to GCSE that is above the national average for pupils of similar ability. Over the same three year period, results at A level were usually well above the average for boys in all maintained schools and were in line with those achieved in maintained selective schools. Results at A level are also good in relation to the ability of the pupils. Progress from GCSE to A level is well above the national norm.
- 2.12 Individual, personal and team achievements are numerous and include excellence in sport, drama, social work, CCF, public speaking, creative writing, music and art. The school is recognised nationally as a centre of excellence for rugby and has enjoyed success in the Daily Mail Cup competition at both under-15 and under-18 level for several years. National and international honours have been won by individuals and teams and the high number of awards confirms the school's commitment to encourage the pursuit of excellence and to developing young men and women who will aspire to achieve success. The award to pupils over the last three years of nearly 20 Princess Diana Awards for service to the less privileged illustrates the school's commitment to mutual service as one of its aims.
- 2.13 Pupils make effective notes in a range of styles, becoming particularly adept by the sixth form. Their files and books are well organised and carefully kept. They show maturity in working independently when stimulated to do so and they demonstrate good independence of mind in class discussions and activities. In a drama lesson, for example, groups of pupils in Year 11 worked unsupervised with a minimal initial brief and returned to perform well-prepared and thought-out sketches. Despite the good ICT skills that most have acquired, pupils do not fully exploit these skills to assist their learning, nor do they make much use of the school library as a learning resource, relying instead on their teachers and text books as their sources of information.
- 2.14 Pupils are cooperative towards and considerate of one another. They work very well in collaborative situations, demonstrating tolerance for other people's viewpoints and respect for turn taking, reflecting the school's ethos. This is apparent in class, in activities such as team games and musical ensembles, and around the school, where mutual support is the norm.
- 2.15 Pupils settle well to work and persevere even when a few lessons are not particularly stimulating. They derive considerable satisfaction and enjoyment from participating successfully in tasks and activities. Their attitude to learning is very positive and contributes significantly to the good standards that they achieve in their work and activities.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.16 The personal development of the pupils is outstanding, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. Pupils demonstrate well-developed spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. The Rule of St Benedict and the school's mission permeate the community in a palpable way as a sense of shared purpose in growing towards 'discernment' in life. Qualities such as tolerance, forgiveness, mutual support and hospitality abound in the school community. Pupils have many opportunities to experience a sense of wonder and to make progress towards a full humanity, enhanced by a sense of their own spirituality and an awareness of right and wrong.
- 2.17 The pupils' excellent spiritual development is fostered by the sense of stability generated by the daily practice of adherence to the Benedictine way. The spiritual development of individuals manifests itself most obviously in the way in which they relate to each other, both students and teachers. In appreciating the worth of others, pupils learn respect for themselves and how to live out the gospel values that they have learned. Collective acts of worship in assemblies or in the Abbey Church are respectful and prayerful and evoke a high level of pupil participation. The Abbey Church itself provides an awe-inspiring backdrop for worship. Registration sessions are accompanied by prayer, in which pupils happily participate and which they sometimes lead. Mass is celebrated weekly in the school chapel for those staff and pupils who wish to attend. Retreats organised for each year group give valuable time for reflection and for spiritual growth. Trips are organised, for instance to Rome on a study pilgrimage and to Lourdes, where pupils develop their understanding or are able to express their commitment to service. Most of all the pupils assimilate the pattern for a whole way of life, as part of which the school encourages former pupils to feel that they remain part of the Benedictine community which has shaped them.
- 2.18 Pupils develop a strong personal morality. The qualities of character from which moral and responsible behaviour proceed are acquired cumulatively through the good quality relationships which pupils form. Staff and older pupils act as excellent rôle models and their example of care, respect and tolerance for others plays a strong part in developing the moral code of younger pupils. The school rules, which emphasise consideration for others, make sense to the pupils and they respect them. They behave well towards each other and towards all they meet, and clearly exhibit a strong sense of right and wrong. Division heads, each responsible for a particular year group, and form tutors emphasise forgiveness and the mending of relationships when things go wrong. Through the PSHCE course pupils develop appropriate understanding of how the law in England works. A workshop day for pupils in Year 7 brought representatives of the police, the magistrates, the youth offending team, the prison service and victim support to school. A session on human rights for pupils in Year 13 explored the ethical issues surrounding capital punishment and the way in which it operates in some states in the United States. Another session for pupils in Year 12 explored the concept of being a 'good citizen'. In form periods, in lessons, in year group and full assemblies, every opportunity is taken to help pupils learn to distinguish between right and wrong.
- 2.19 The school's ethos is the driving force behind the pupils' development of excellent social skills. Examples of service to others set by the monks, the leadership team, teachers and senior pupils create a strong sense of social cohesion, within which pupils develop effective cooperative team-working skills, whether in support of one of their peers, playing their part in sports teams, musical groups or in the theatre, or raising money for charity. The PSHCE programme for Years 7 and 8 contains work on emotional intelligence and conflict management, but the emphasis on personal development throughout the school also plays a large part in the acquisition of social skills. Pupils contribute willingly and abundantly to all aspects of the school's life and take part in a wide range of activities, such as debating,

charity fund raising and mentoring junior school pupils, all of which help their social development. Sound knowledge of public institutions in England is acquired via the citizenship part of the PSHCE programme. The well-established school council allows pupils good opportunities to represent their peers, to make their voices heard and sometimes to effect change. Senior pupils may apply to be appointed as members of the prefect body and thus extend their experience of responsibility and leadership. Sixth-form community service takes place under the auspices of the St Vincent de Paul Society, though this is limited to those who choose to participate.

- 2.20 The cultural development of pupils is good in many respects. The tolerance and harmony clearly promoted by the Rule of St Benedict extends to other faiths and cultures in a spirit of respect and welcome, but the opportunities to learn more about other major world religions are inadequate and pupils are consequently not well informed about them. Pupils learn to look outwards from their own community to the world at large so that they do develop an appreciation of the ways of life in other parts of the world. Interesting and empathetic work was undertaken by pupils in Year 9 in geography lessons on development and the contrasts between richer and poorer countries. The extensive programme of trips abroad extends the cultural horizons of those pupils who participate. Places visited recently have included Sri Lanka, where the pupils were immersed in a very different culture, New Zealand and a regular exchange that takes place with the Escalonia de Montserrat choir school in Spain. The extensive programme of music and drama, visits into London, and their knowledge of the history of the monastic movement in the Catholic Church, ensures that pupils' awareness of their own cultural inheritance is strongly developed.
- 2.21 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.22 The quality of teaching is strong, often excellent and occasionally inspirational. It enables pupils to learn effectively and make good progress, and it is significantly better than at the time of the last inspection. Assessment and monitoring of academic performance are thorough, but marking of pupils' work is inconsistent, particularly in the middle years, and the school has strategies in place to improve this.
- 2.23 Teaching helps all pupils to acquire new knowledge and develop their understanding and skills according to their abilities. The identification of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) is good and the levels of support available are appropriate. Most pupils who have LDD receive in-class support and a few with more complex or severe needs receive specialist one-to-one support lessons. Whole-school awareness of LDD is good, and discrete in-class support is effective, enabling tasks and materials to be matched appropriately to individual pupil needs. Good communication from the learning support department keeps teachers abreast of the particular needs and aptitudes of those pupils assessed as having LDD. The pupils who have a local authority statement of special needs have their individual needs suitably met and each of their cases undergoes a full annual review. The very small number of pupils for whom English is not their first language is monitored in class but none requires additional support in order to be able to access the curriculum and make appropriate progress. Pupils identified as being gifted and talented are sometimes provided with extension work in lessons or for homework, although this extension is better in some areas of the curriculum than others. Girls, who are sometimes a significant minority in classes, are nevertheless afforded the same opportunities as boys to participate and progress.

- 2.24 Imaginative teaching provides many opportunities for intellectual, creative and physical challenge in lessons, in debating, sport, art, music and drama, and in the many other activities offered by the school. Pupils in Year 7, for example, discussing prayer in a religious studies lesson, began with a game of Chinese whispers to underline the difficulties inherent in effective communication; an intelligent and informed discussion followed. The encouragement by teachers of independent learning is mixed, although some excellent examples of this occur in the humanities, art, design and technology and music. This was apparent when Year 12 pupils studying government and politics were asked to make presentations on the options for electoral reform that they had previously researched. Often pupils who use ICT well for independent study do so of their own volition rather than directly as a result of teacher suggestion, although good use is made of specialist software in music and design.
- 2.25 Teachers enjoy good rapport with their pupils and have high expectations of them. Classes are usually conducted in a lively and purposeful style which is conducive to good behaviour and which demands the pupils' attention. Pupils in a Year 8 mathematics lesson, learning about significant figures, responded to the teacher's rapid mental testing with evident enjoyment and pleasure at learning a new skill.
- 2.26 Lessons are consistently well planned and often executed at a good pace. Learning objectives are widely met and lesson content is appropriate and often includes interesting and varied activities. Pupils in a Year 11 religious studies lesson, for example, moved rapidly through a series of tasks planned to teach them about the stages of the sacrament of reconciliation before successfully applying what they had learned to the story of the prodigal son.
- 2.27 Teachers know their pupils well and teaching is well tailored to the needs and aptitudes of the pupils, and takes good account of their prior levels of attainment. The school's tracking system ensures that teachers are well informed about individual pupils' performance and potential.
- 2.28 Teachers are well-qualified and knowledgeable in their subjects, and some are passionate enthusiasts able to convey their own interest and inspiration to the pupils. Many are also skilled users of technology to enhance their teaching.
- 2.29 Teaching makes effective use of the good text book resources available but teachers are aware that the library is not a particularly useful resource for independent learning and fails to enhance or stimulate opportunities for independent research. Borrowing rates are low. Although teaching frequently makes use of the interactive whiteboard, its full potential is not universally realised across departments.
- 2.30 Marking of pupils' work is generally regular but the standard is inconsistent and in a number of subjects falls short of the school's marking policy recommendation to include advice on improvement. The best examples of marking provide clear and specific targets for improvement, which pupils confirmed that they find helpful. In a significant minority of cases, however, marking was no better than an overall grade or a single word comment. Aware of this variation, the school has established a schedule to ensure regular monitoring of marking by heads of department and division heads.
- 2.31 Monitoring and assessment, described in the school prospectus as 'extensive and rigorous', live up to that claim. A comprehensive system of assessment uses a process of target setting, tracking and monitoring to drive progress and raise standards. Underachievers make demonstrably better progress as a consequence of meticulous monitoring and appropriate intervention. Self-assessment is not yet fully implemented although the school aspires to

make greater use of it to increase pupils' awareness of their own progress and learning objectives.

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

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

- 3.1 The school provides outstanding pastoral care, support and guidance for all pupils. The high quality of arrangements for pastoral care and for the welfare, health and safety of pupils noted at the last inspection has further improved and fully supports the school's stated aims. Pupils of all ages feel well cared for and valued as individuals. Parents and pupils are very appreciative of the care provided, as was evident in the responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires and was also expressed by pupils during interviews.
- 3.2 Form tutors are central to the pastoral care structure, providing effective daily oversight of each pupil's personal development and academic progress. The twice-daily contact that they have with their forms enables a trustful relationship to be built with, and a close eye kept on, each individual. Pupils feel secure in the knowledge that they have a member of staff who knows them well. The division heads meet regularly with the form tutors in their year group to provide support, to coordinate their work and to ensure consistency within the pastoral system. The head of middle and upper school (Years 7 to 11), the director of sixth form and the deputy heads provide further valuable layers of support and important links into the senior leadership team. Creation of the role of head of girls' pastoral care has been a sensible precaution to ensure that during the transition to full co-education their welfare is closely monitored and protected. From the time of their entry into the school, the needs of all the pupils are carefully and sensitively met by the pastoral structure established.
- 3.3 The quality of relationships is excellent throughout the school. Pupils speak highly of their teachers in all aspects of school life and believe that teachers genuinely care about their well-being. Mutual respect between pupils and teachers and between the pupils themselves is evident. The school has a very strong community spirit and the Benedictine aims underlie the way in which people normally treat one another.
- 3.4 The comprehensive anti-bullying policy is known to all pupils and works well in practice. Incidents of bullying are infrequent. Those that do occur are reported by pupils as having been dealt with rapidly and sensitively. The merit system rewards good behaviour and is effective in promoting mutual respect and tolerance among the younger pupils. The high level of self-discipline and respect that prevails ensures good behaviour and order further up the school.
- 3.5 Practice in respect of child protection is good. All members of the school staff have received appropriate training in child protection procedures. The child protection policy has recently been brought up to date and approved by the trustees. The school calendar contains a lengthy list of the names of members of staff to whom pupils can turn with problems, and the telephone numbers of appropriate childcare agencies and the local authority services are well advertised. The school attendance and admissions registers are properly kept using a computerised system and pupils' attendance is also checked in each lesson. A thorough procedure to follow up any unexpected absences by telephone has been established.
- 3.6 Effective health and safety policies and procedures are in place. The school uses outside consultants to monitor and give advice on safety matters and appropriate guidance on risk assessment is provided for staff organising trips away from school. A more than sufficient number of staff holds a first-aid certificate and these are kept up to date. The medical room is staffed by a fully qualified nurse, who is available to see pupils who are sick or injured and to provide a further sympathetic ear for those who are worried. Fire evacuation practices are held regularly and the premises have been inspected by the fire authority. Most areas of the

school have good access for the disabled, enabling any member of the school with a physical disability to follow a full curriculum.

- 3.7 Healthy eating is promoted as part of the PSHCE syllabus. Meals are appetising with a good choice of hot or cold dishes and a vegetarian option or a salad. Fresh fruit is always available. Arrangements for lunch are such that queues are rapidly built. Lack of space together with inadequate supervision result in meals being rushed with little opportunity for socialising. Regular exercise is encouraged and all pupils have weekly games lessons. A high number of pupils participated in a recent walk-to-school week, which was enjoyed by many.
- 3.8 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

- 3.9 The school has established strong and constructive links with parents, in line with its aims. In addition, it has developed many productive links with the wider community, which enrich the pupils' educational experience. This is similar to the situation at the time of the last inspection, but the reporting system has been markedly improved since then.
- 3.10 The overwhelming majority of parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire are highly satisfied with the school's provision, with particular satisfaction being expressed over the range of extra-curricular activities, the help and guidance provided, the scope of the curriculum, the values and attitudes promoted and the quality of the teaching. No area of significant dissatisfaction emerged from the responses, and one in seven of the parents added an unsolicited comment expressing their delight in the education provided for their children.
- 3.11 Parents have ample opportunity to be involved in school activities and in the work and progress of their children. Parents are readily able to follow the day-to-day progress of their child using the weekly progress cards which pupils in Years 7 to 11 carry. Pupils below the sixth form also carry a prep diary, by means of which parents can see what work is being set for homework. The parental handbook contains helpful information about school policies and practice, and the termly calendar keeps parents well informed about forthcoming events. An informative newsletter from the headmaster is published seven times a year, whilst the termly magazine 'From the Smallest Beginnings' and the school magazine, 'The Priorian', record pupils' achievements. The school website, which is still under development, already provides an important source of information. Parents regularly attend school fixtures and events and their support is highly valued. The Society of Parents and Friends actively promotes cooperation between parents, staff and friends of the school. Parents recently helped to raise significant funding for a rugby tour to New Zealand, and an under-12 rugby tour to Dubai was accompanied by a parallel parents' tour. The school hosts a Parents' Forum each term at which a presentation on a given theme is made to both senior and junior school parents, thereby strengthening the home-school partnership.
- 3.12 Parents and prospective parents receive good information and are well informed about the work and progress of their children. Every year group has a helpful information evening at the start of the year when parents meet pastoral and subject teachers. Annual parents' evenings enable parents and teachers to discuss pupils' progress. Following the last inspection, the reporting process has been strengthened and parents in Years 7 to 10 now receive two detailed written reports each year, though the information they provide about work covered and in setting targets for improvement is inconsistent and the school plans to provide fuller guidance for teachers on report writing. In addition, a centrally compiled and recorded assessment in each subject is sent to parents every term, giving a good check on

current progress. Regular open mornings, or evenings, for prospective parents enable these parents to inform themselves appropriately about the school. In Years 9 and 11, meetings are arranged for parents to discuss options for the next stage of education. Parents and pupils are provided with useful booklets to help with subject choices. The last inspection report commented that these booklets omit details of the options structure and this remains the case, although pupils in Year 11 have a helpful individual careers interview to discuss options.

- 3.13 The school handles parents' concerns well. A detailed record is kept of formal complaints and the complaints procedure is published in the parents' handbook and on the website. Everyday concerns are dealt with promptly and effectively and email is often used to hasten communication. Parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire were well satisfied with the manner in which the school deals with their concerns.
- 3.14 The school has positive and extensive links with the wider community. These have improved since the last inspection, although the considerable resource on its doorstep that is the city of London is still under used. The monastic community provides stability and continuity, which extend into the local community through the work of the parish, in which many members of the school are involved.
- 3.15 Under the auspices of the St Vincent de Paul Society, sixth-form pupils help at a church soup kitchen and at the local branch of Mencap, gaining an experience of service that accords fully with the school aims. The school has forged good links through its support of local charities; middle school pupils organise a clothing collection at Christmas for a community project and a charities committee has recently been established to oversee the extensive fund-raising activities, which include an annual charity day on St Benedict's day. The Christmas party for senior citizens, hosted by sixth formers, is financed from funds raised by the pupils.
- 3.16 Links between the senior and junior schools are strong, which is to the advantage of pupils in both sections of the school. They are fostered by the house system which runs through both schools, by the fact that the games and music departments are common to both schools and by sixth-form pupils who assist junior school pupils, notably in ADT and English. Examples of links with local schools abound, the drama department offers workshops in other schools, and has a reciprocal arrangement with another school whereby each school presents its A-level presentation to the other, and the CCF has admitted pupils from another Catholic school. Pupils in Year 7 from other schools recently participated in a series of workshops on the work of the law enforcement agencies, and pupils from eight local primary schools join in days specially arranged for the gifted and talented. A partnership with two London colleges enables the school to support the training of teachers.
- 3.17 Many overseas trips and tours enable worthwhile links to be maintained with the wider world community and significantly add to the educational experience of those pupils who participate in them. In particular, pupils from Year 12 travel to Lourdes at Easter each year and spend a week helping children from the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust. In support of the school's ethos, close links are maintained with other Benedictine organisations around the world and the school hosts an annual retreat for head boys and girls from other English Benedictine schools. Senior staff meet every three years with their counterparts from other schools in the International Conference of Benedictine Educators, pupils from St Benedict's recently attended an international Benedictine conference in Sydney, and members of a lay Benedictine movement in Chile came to England and met members of the sixth form.
- 3.18 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Governance is good and stronger than was reported at the last inspection. The structure established is particular to the needs of a Benedictine school but is well defined and enables effective oversight of the school. The whole ethos and purpose of the school stem from the life of the monastic community which founded and owns it. The members of the Abbot's Council are the trustees and carry the responsibilities of governorship. They work in close collaboration with, and largely under the advice of, the Board of School Advisers (BSA) which consists of the trustees and lay people of wide-ranging experience and expertise. This collaboration, and consequently the role of the advisers, has been strengthened following a review of governance that has resulted in more effective oversight of the school.
- 4.2 Both trustees and advisers are well aware of the responsibilities and duties of governors and are actively involved in planning and development. Sub-committees of the BSA provide effective monitoring and support of educational development, proper financial control and budgeting, good support for ICT, effective oversight of marketing and regular evaluation of the performance of the BSA itself. The school has benefited from the guidance and foresight of the trustees and advisers, as well as from the substantial investment and generally good resources provided.
- 4.3 Trustees and advisers have a shrewd understanding of the school and are in a position to offer appropriate advice, support and stimulus, and to ensure that the school fulfils its mission as a Catholic Benedictine foundation. Some trustees work in the school; all live on the campus. The advisers have established appropriate means of informing themselves about the work of the school, including receiving regular reports from academic departments and delegating one adviser to attend a termly meeting of the teaching staff. Despite these arrangements, some staff do not properly understand the respective roles of trustees and advisers and their responsibilities.
- 4.4 The trustees and advisers are fully aware of, and diligent in discharging, their responsibilities for the welfare, health and safety of pupils, including taking proper steps to review and evaluate the effectiveness of their child protection policies and procedures. A serious recent incident involving a member of the monastic community caused the trustees to request an independent review of the measures taken to minimize risk. The advice received from the independent experts has been fully implemented.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The leadership of the headmaster and his senior team is excellent. It provides the clear vision and direction that nurture a distinctive identity for the school and a genuine sense of community. It is instrumental in the school's high degree of success in fulfilling its aim of 'teaching a way of living'. Management throughout the school is good. Heads of department fulfil their duties and responsibilities effectively although, as the school is aware, some areas of inconsistency remain. The school has significantly improved in its management and monitoring since the last inspection.
- 4.6 The large leadership team oversees all aspects of school life, setting standards and encouraging a constant search for improvement. Responsibilities are effectively delegated enabling the school to plan and to make significant advances. Members of staff have a high regard for the senior leadership team, and appreciate the educational direction and the high level of challenge provided. The recent move to co-education has been especially well

- implemented and managed. The involvement of girls in all aspects of school life has been achieved seamlessly and naturally.
- 4.7 The leadership team has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development, and has formulated a comprehensive school improvement plan, which is reflected in departmental improvement plans. Members of the leadership team work closely with departments as link managers to provide support and guidance on a regular basis, and to ensure effective communication between departments and the senior management of the school.
- 4.8 Policies are clearly written and are generally well implemented, monitored and reviewed. The great majority of heads of department manage and monitor their departments to good effect. The sharing of good practice is developing and excellent procedures have been established for monitoring standards in teaching and learning. This has much improved since the last inspection. However, a significant minority of heads of department are inconsistent in their monitoring and overseeing of the implementation of the school's policies on marking, assessment and report writing.
- 4.9 The school is well staffed and is able to recruit personnel of high calibre. Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and newly appointed teachers undergo a comprehensive and supportive induction programme, which includes conveying to them the school's core Benedictine ethos and values. The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of NQTs and, in addition, supports the initial training of teachers through links with two other training institutions. The school's arrangements for checking the suitability of staff and others who have contact with children are rigorous and carefully recorded in the central recruitment register. The annual professional review process is appreciated by the staff as being supportive, as is the ample provision for professional development.
- 4.10 Financial management of the school is strong and well managed by the bursar and her staff. Prudent policies and controls are in place to ensure financial stability. Significant investment has been made in the fabric of the school's new buildings and in the provision of ICT hardware and software. Departmental budgets are ample. The provision of educational resources is generally good, although the school library is inadequate.
- 4.11 The school operates efficiently from day to day. The considerable commitment of the support staff contributes significantly to this.
- 4.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.13 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 St Benedict's School is highly successful in achieving its aims of providing good quality Catholic education and 'teaching a way of living' derived from the Rule of St Benedict. The pastoral care and personal development of the pupils are excellent and recognised as such by the parents. Teaching is strong, often excellent and at times inspirational, and enables willing and cooperative pupils to achieve examination results at both GCSE and A level that are good in relation to their abilities. Leadership is excellent and clearly focused. The school has recently introduced full co-education and the transition is being very well managed. Pupils are pleased and proud to be at the school and speak highly of both it and the staff who support them. Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent and conducive to successful learning. The education offered is enhanced by a rich co-curricular programme, which has enabled some outstanding sporting achievements.
- 5.2 The school has made rapid progress since the last inspection conducted by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) in January 2004, most notably in the marked improvement in the quality of the educational experience offered, including greater consistency in the quality of teaching and the leadership of academic departments, a clearer ethos, excellent pastoral care and personal development and stronger governance and management. The recommendations of the previous report have been fully implemented.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 All major aspects of the school are either good or outstanding. In order to improve further the high quality of education that it provides the school should take the following steps.
1. Review the way in which some elements of the enhanced curriculum are provided so as to ensure that all pupils benefit from:
 - a broader sixth-form enrichment programme;
 - a careers education programme that extends throughout the school;
 - learning more about major world religions other than Christianity.
 2. Develop the library as a significant educational resource that encourages pupils to make greater use of both books and the extensive ICT resources that are available to facilitate their independent learning.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 9th to 12th November 2009. 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. Inspectors visited the medical room. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mr Rodney Fox	Reporting Inspector
Mr Gino Carminati	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Ian Carter	Former Deputy Head, HMC school
Mrs Sylvia Leyton	Former Deputy Head, GSA school
Mrs Kate McCarey	Senior Teacher, HMC school
Mr Peter Sutton	Deputy Head, HMC school
Dr Stephanie Thomas	Head of Department, HMC school