

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

INSPECTION OF

BEDFORD SCHOOL

By the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

On

9th – 12th October, 2006

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Bedford School

Full Name of the School	Bedford School
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Registered Charity Number	204817
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Chairman of Governors	His Honour Judge Simon Brown QC
Age Range	13-18
Gender	Boys
Inspection Dates	9th – 12th October 2006

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

The inspection 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.

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 Bedford School is an independent day and boarding school for pupils aged 7 to 18, where academic success, sport and cultural achievements, and a broad general education, are all valued. The school has its own Bedford School Study Centre for boys and girls from abroad who need to improve their English before joining independent boarding schools in the United Kingdom. This inspection focuses on the work and activities of the senior school, for boys aged 13 to 18, with an overview of the study centre, although facilities are shared amongst all three institutions on site.
- 1.2 The school's aims refer to the provision of a vibrant and stimulating environment where each boy is encouraged to build upon his individual strengths, to surprise himself, to delight in achievement and, ultimately, to leave school with his ambitions extended. Academic excellence is the primary objective, but the school also strives for educational breadth, and to provide lifelong learning skills. It aims to generate an all-round education of the highest standard where the boys develop an enthusiasm and appetite for learning.
- 1.3 Long established, founded in the 16th century and endowed as one of the five schools in the Harpur Trust, the school moved to its current parkland site in 1891. It has an Anglican foundation, but one where boys from all faiths are welcomed.
- 1.4 Since the time of the last inspection six years ago, the school has remained similar in size, currently with 657 boys aged 13 to 18, including 273 in the sixth form. 242 boys are full or weekly boarders and 415 are day pupils. New facilities have been provided over the past six years, including an observatory and planetarium, music school and library. The school has introduced the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma into the sixth form, changed the way the working week is organised, acquired many more computers, formalised links with a girls' school within the Harpur Trust family of schools, and promoted the understanding of citizenship.
- 1.5 Boys enter the senior school at age 13 in Year 9, the school's 'fourths'. About three-quarters join from the preparatory department, others from a range of preparatory schools. Entry is dependent upon a pupil's academic capability as shown in common entrance examinations, an interview, school tests and the pupil's previous school reports. Transfer from the preparatory department is not automatic but in practice nearly all boys, who wish to, do enter Year 9. Each year about twenty-five boys join the sixth form from other schools, following success in GCSE or Hong Kong CEE, an interview, and a suitable report from their current school.
- 1.6 Evidence from nationally standardised tests and school assessments indicates that pupils' ability on entry is wide-ranging, whilst overall well above the national average. If boys are performing in line with their abilities, their results will be well above the average for all maintained secondary schools. About one in seven of the pupils are from overseas, and for them English is not the first language spoken at home. Over half these pupils receive support for their English. They are mainly from Germany, China and Hong Kong. The school provides additional educational support for about one fifth of the boys who have been identified with dyslexia or other additional needs. A small proportion of these receive extra specialised support. No pupils have statements of additional educational need.

- 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.

Senior School

School	NC name
Fourths	Year 9
Remove	Year 10
Fifths	Year 11
Lower sixth	Year 12
Upper sixth	Year 13

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The school provides a wide range of academic opportunities and excellent extra-curricular activities, well suited to the diverse interests and needs of all pupils. The education provided is consistent with the school's aims for the curriculum. Pupils derive great benefit from the breadth of the educational experience and study a good range of subjects, appropriate to their ages, interests and abilities. The introduction, in 2003, of the IB Diploma in the sixth form has added an extra dimension, reflecting the forward thinking of the school. Substantial progress has been made in improving the curriculum since the last inspection.
- 2.2 The educational package provided makes a positive contribution to linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development, and to acquisition of skills of speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. Frequent opportunities for information and communication technology (ICT) skill development are provided through the large number of computers available, and a focus on the use of electronic communication.
- 2.3 The school curriculum statement refers to '...sensitive to its past, the school has a commitment to innovation and to the best contemporary practices'. This is fulfilled in the developing focus on citizenship education, the use of video conferencing to involve experts in discussions with the boys, and a research project involving higher education and the maintained sector, looking at underachievement and pupils' preferred learning styles.
- 2.4 The exceptional range of over eighty extra-curricular activities covers sporting, musical, social and intellectual pursuits as well as the Combined Cadet Force and Duke of Edinburgh Award. An expectation that pupils will be involved in activities beyond the normal teaching day is firmly embedded into the culture of the school, supported by strong staff commitment and involvement. All boys find areas of interest. Pupils are encouraged to participate in the wider community, helping in local schools and on environmental projects. Those pupils following the IB take part in a Community, Action and Service programme, where they provide support, such as helping with riding for the disabled. Pupils in discussions remarked upon their pleasure at the outstanding range of activities on offer, reinforcing the Head Master's vision of 'delighting in achievement'.
- 2.5 Helpful careers advice is provided for pupils in all years. The school hosts a useful annual careers fair with contributions from many Old Boys. Year 9 pupils and their parents are very well briefed on the implications of GCSE option choices. Similarly effective discussions take place in Year 11, when decisions are made about subject choices and the selection of A-level courses or the IB Diploma in the sixth form. Sixth-form pupils are guided through the university application process, and provided with advice on future careers. Those pupils applying for very popular courses, such as medicine, and to the most prestigious universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge, are given the additional help they need to aid their chances of success.
- 2.6 The curriculum has both breadth and balance. Excellent curriculum links are maintained with the Bedford Preparatory School. Boys are offered a wide range of subjects at GCSE and an excellent range post-16, within both A-level and IB choices, as well as e-learning facilities. The vast majority of pupils have equal access to the curriculum, although some sensible and appropriate restrictions are placed on pupils for whom English is an additional language. Time allocations for subjects are generally appropriate. However, English receives one fewer period each week than mathematics in Years 9 and 10, which does create difficulties in covering all aspects of the subject. The curriculum plan for 2006-7 shows an

additional period allocated to English in Year 10, but the shortfall remains an issue in Year 9. Some difficulties exist in the scheduling and setting of classes because of the great complexities associated with timetabling A-level and IB courses. The school is aware of the problem and has in hand new arrangements that should prevent, for example, bunching of periods for subjects where it would be preferable to have them spread over the week.

- 2.7 Pupils in need of learning support, including those pupils for whom English is an additional language, are identified early in their time at the school and are well catered for in a caring and responsible manner. Additional specialist help is provided for those in greatest need and all teaching staff are informed of pupils' needs through the school's intranet. The most capable pupils are well provided for through various activities and specialist clubs, and the IB programme. Several subjects, including mathematics, English and geography, provide extension material intended to challenge the highest attainers.
- 2.8 The school has a Study Centre for boys and girls aged 11-16 for whom English is an additional language. After spending time at the Centre, some pupils return home, having improved their English; others move into the British education system, either at Bedford School or elsewhere. The focus is on acquiring a good standard of spoken and written English, but the curriculum includes mathematics and a good range of other subjects, ensuring that each pupil experiences an appropriate curriculum. The educational experience provided is good and substantially better than that available at the time of the last inspection.
- 2.9 The school meets regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.10 Across the school pupils learn and achieve very well in relation to their ages and abilities. Pupils have a thorough and detailed knowledge of the subjects they study, reflecting the school's aim of ensuring that academic excellence is paramount. The good progress and high standards identified at the time of the last inspection are even better today.
- 2.11 A focus on learning and on achieving success, both academically and in activities, is important to staff and pupils. Considerable evidence of creativity exists: for example in design and technology, pupils created models of their initials, which imaginatively reflected their personalities. In lessons, pupils are prepared to be self-critical. They can give and receive criticism and use this as the basis for improvement. Their capacity for critical thinking was demonstrated in several classes. In a Year 12 philosophy lesson, for example, boys discussed the ideas of Kant and Bentham with obvious understanding. Year 9 pupils skilfully compared each other's work in an English class.
- 2.12 Pupils' attainment at GCSE, A level and in the IB is high in relation to their abilities. GCSE results over the three-year period 2003-5 were far above the national average for boys in all maintained schools, and above the average for maintained selective schools. During the same period, A-level results were well above the national averages for all maintained schools and for maintained selective schools. For the two years since the IB diploma was introduced, a high proportion of boys have gained the top two levels. Results in public examinations have improved since the last inspection, though the 2006 GCSE results were slightly lower than the average for the three preceding years. The quality of the school's examination results reflects the good teaching pupils receive as well as their very positive attitude to study.
- 2.13 Outstanding attainment was seen in several lessons, for example in a Year 10 music class, where the boys demonstrated an exceptional grasp of technical vocabulary and musical structure. Since the last inspection, there has been a notable rise in the achievements of

pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language, as a result of the improved quality of support offered.

- 2.14 The school has an outstanding record of individual and team achievements. Sports teams are very successful, with the under-15 rugby team winning the major national competition in 2006 and the bridge team taking national honours in 2005. Considerable success is achieved in the British Olympiads in mathematics, the sciences and informatics as well as in a national design and technology award. Four pupils in recent years have won music composition scholarships with the National Youth Orchestra, an exceptional achievement. These and many other examples of excellence reflect a school culture of high expectations and widespread opportunities.
- 2.15 Most pupils are highly articulate, speak confidently and fluently, and express themselves clearly. A small number rarely offer their views in lessons and are not always encouraged to do so. The boys respect each other's views and listen intently to their teachers. Many examples of excellent written work were seen, both in shorter pieces and in essays and extended coursework projects. Some pupils, however, take less care with their writing and do not develop their ideas in sufficient depth. The boys apply mathematical concepts confidently in a range of subjects, for example in Year 9 French where boys had produced well-constructed bar and pie charts. Good use of ICT by pupils was seen in several lessons. Considerable, though not universal, evidence exists of ICT use in pupils' work.
- 2.16 In many classes, pupils show that they can debate and reason calmly and clearly. Particularly good examples were seen in an economics discussion on wealth taxes and in a German class debate on German military involvement in the Near East. Most pupils take notes conscientiously and, when these are given out by teachers, they personalise the notes as an aid to learning. Most exercise books and files are ordered and detailed, but a few seen were poorly organised and contained incomplete pieces of work.
- 2.17 Pupils develop very effective study skills. Their motivation is high and most show that they can work independently, using learnt research skills. They show a strong work ethic during private study times. The school's comprehensive intranet, accessible by the boys both in school and at home, and the large number of modern computers available, facilitate the development of strong independent learning. The pupils co-operate very well with each other, as was seen in a Year 9 English lesson where pupils gave oral presentations that were assessed by their peers. Boys' hard work, application and perseverance are particularly noticeable characteristics and these attributes, strongly encouraged by the school, contribute significantly to success both in and out of the classroom.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.18 The boys' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and a great strength of the school. The school lives up to its Christian Foundation and aims. Pupils' personal development is substantially better than as described at the time of the last inspection. A strong moral code is evident amongst the boys and encouraged by caring staff. The school's many varied opportunities for promoting social development and taking responsibility result in excellent attitudes and behaviour. The boys' cultural knowledge is good; they have a wide range of opportunities to develop an understanding of British and other cultures.
- 2.19 Spiritual development is of a high order, following the school's Anglican tradition. Boys show reverence and reflection in the weekly chapel services, led by both Christian and non-Christian members of staff. Other assemblies, such as those taking place in the school's Great Hall, are said by the boys and staff to be similarly spiritual. Students from other faiths

are encouraged to participate, generating an inclusive approach, which adds to the value of such occasions. Pupils know they are valued and respected whatever their background. The boys' excellent spiritual growth is evident in lessons as well as these more formal occasions, for example participating in philosophical debate in religious studies lessons, taken by all pupils up to the end of Year 10. The boys' knowledge of themselves develops effectively, resulting in reflective young men.

- 2.20 A strong sense of right and wrong and high moral character are key characteristics of the boys. Very occasionally individuals go beyond the school's considered rules and are disciplined appropriately, but the vast majority are courteous and polite to each other, staff and visitors. This quality of moral development is achieved through the staff's encouragement for what is acceptable at Bedford School, and the example they set in generating an ethos where respect and responsibility are seen to matter. Boarding and day housemasters play a key role, as do sixth form monitors, who strongly encourage boys to follow the school rules.
- 2.21 Pupils have a good awareness of citizenship as a result of personal, social and health education lessons. Their understanding of sex education, the harmful nature of drugs, and the role of institutions such as the police are good, but knowledge of Britain's legal and governmental systems is sketchier. Boys commented upon their enthusiasm for visiting speakers, whom they generally found informative and interesting.
- 2.22 Boys compete in a great range of events, which improve their self-esteem and understanding of the pleasures of competing as well as winning. Their social development is excellent. During the inspection the boys were preparing for the annual house singing competition around which there was a real buzz. All involved took their practices very seriously, although fun aspects were celebrated too. Tickets were hard to get hold of! Almost all boys play for a competitive school sports team at some time in their time at Bedford and gain from the experience. Boys also learn to show initiative, and take responsibility for themselves and others, by taking part in challenging activities both within and outside the school, for example in debating competitions. A strong sense of community and cooperation is evident throughout the school, fostered by the house system. Parental and pupil questionnaire findings provide further support for the high standard of behaviour and positive attitudes and values, expected by the school and achieved by the boys.
- 2.23 Boys welcome the opportunity to work with girls from local schools, particularly in music, drama and joint Combined Cadet Force activities. They are very happy to contribute to the wider community in outreach projects, such as an elderly people's tea party, musical outings into the community and through the sharing of school resources such as the planetarium and observatory. The boys have their own charities committee, which generates substantial sums each year for selected groups.
- 2.24 Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of various cultures. They make good use of a wide variety of trips and residential visits to broaden their horizons in this country and further afield, recently in France, Germany and Spain. Boys appreciate the lectures which help them to develop their understanding of society in Britain today; these have included topics as diverse as blood and bone marrow donation and the Notting Hill Carnival. Occasionally, opportunities that presented themselves in lessons were not used to best advantage in raising boys' awareness of how they could learn about each other's cultural backgrounds
- 2.25 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.26 The quality of teaching is good overall with some outstanding aspects, from which the boys benefit greatly. “Through its staff the school aims to provide expertise and commitment” is a key tenet of the school’s aims and this is entirely met, although not all lessons stirred the interest of pupils, an objective stated in the school prospectus. The quality of teaching today is much better than at the time of the last inspection. Assessment is effective and of a similar quality to that reported previously, with good use made of the school’s excellent performance data.
- 2.27 The good, and often outstanding, quality of relationships between teachers and their pupils is a prime cause of boys’ motivation and striving for success. Teachers know the boys in their classes very well and work extremely hard to maximise their achievements.
- 2.28 Lessons observed were well planned; effort, interest and independent learning were fostered by a variety of approaches to teaching. Some of these differed greatly from each other, but were often equally effective. In a French lesson the pace was fast and furious, with real challenges coming at pupils from all angles, prompting an outstanding response. In a music lesson, the teacher was gently prompting and acting as a critical friend and mentor; here again the very best was brought out of the boys. A number of lessons took account of boys’ different learning styles. Practical tasks are much appreciated in science, design and technology and art. In English and geography, discussion and peer debate eliciting interest and commitment from the boys.
- 2.29 In many lessons, teaching pays attention to the prior attainment and aptitudes of pupils, including the least academically strong, those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language. Information on individual pupil needs is available for staff and is used well on many occasions, if not always, to select appropriate teaching strategies. The most capable boys are usually challenged by demanding, interesting tasks, particularly in the sixth form. In an IB philosophy lesson, for example, technical terms were revised through an entertaining game involving the boys holding up cards to answer questions. Speed, accuracy and understanding of a high order were expected and achieved. In some lessons the understanding of boys who volunteered little was not checked and they participated insufficiently in what was going on. Significant progress has been made in involving pupils more in lessons since the last inspection, but some practice within the school still falls below the standard of the best of the lessons seen.
- 2.30 Teaching often builds on an outstanding level of teachers’ subject understanding. This high order knowledge extends to appreciation of examination board requirements, enabling boys to know exactly what is required for each grade. Teachers are concerned for the success of their pupils. Additional help, outside lesson time, is readily made available when it is requested. A number of teachers, however, reflect insufficiently on the manner of imparting their knowledge to pupils, and do not always use the most appropriate techniques to help the boys learn.
- 2.31 The school is exceptionally well resourced for both academic teaching and extra-curricular activities and staff make very good use of the facilities on offer. A particular strength is the development of ICT resources. Video-conferencing, computer-aided design and manufacture and interactive whiteboards were all seen being used to enhance learning. E-learning is being adopted, with the chemistry and art departments leading the way. In design and technology, much of the pupils’ work is held electronically. Not all departments have fully embraced this technology.

- 2.32 The school's policy on the assessment of pupils' work has appropriate guidance and departmental policies are derived from this. Implementation of these policies is inconsistent. Much marking is detailed and helpful, but some is perfunctory or of insufficient quantity. Senior managers carry out annually detailed monitoring of the progress of pupils and make contact with parents where praise or guidance is due. Very effective support is provided for pupils who are on borderlines between grades, helping many to achieve better results. This use of individual pupil assessment information, and target setting using nationally recognised commercial data, is a strength of the school, but departmental leaders are not always as involved in the process as they could be.
- 2.33 To state that the teaching encourages pupils to behave responsibly is to mention only one part of a virtuous circle. The whole ethos of the school fosters excellent behaviour. Pupils bring this to the classroom where it is expected as the norm and leave with it reinforced.
- 2.34 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 pastoral care and guidance of an excellent quality. The welfare, health and safety of each boy are given the highest priority. All staff contribute to a pastoral system that is highly effective in both supporting and furthering the aims of the school. Relations between staff and pupils are generally excellent; relations between boys are, perhaps, better yet. The quality of pastoral care provided was a strength at the time of the last inspection and remains so today.
- 3.2 The heart of the pastoral system is the house structure with both house-parents and house-matrons, supported by the school's own medical centre. Separate day and boarding houses are 'twinned' most effectively to ensure the integration of day boys and boarders. A most effective tutor group structure, with 'vertical' groups of mixed years, drawn from the various houses, provides an extra positive dimension to the quality of pastoral and academic care available. Tutors meet daily with their charges to cover matters of routine, review educational progress and to provide a sounding board for problems. Numerous examples of good practice were witnessed at morning registrations, but there is some variability in the quality amongst the large numbers of teaching staff involved.
- 3.3 The complementary house and tutor structures do much to build and enhance the rapport that is evident between boys of all years. This in turn promotes a sense of community and care, and does much to assist academic development.
- 3.4 The school is a very well-disciplined and thoroughly civilized place. Measures to promote good behaviour work extremely well; unacceptable behaviour, should it occur, is swiftly resolved. Boys of all ages are confident that instances of harassment or bullying are very rare, and are equally confident in the school's policy of 'zero tolerance' of such matters. The school has an appropriate anti-bullying policy. Boys understand and appreciate the system of sanctions and rewards, although a few commented that greater prominence of rewards would be appreciated. The boys know they have a wide range of staff to whom they can turn if problems occur, either personal or academic, and they believe issues are resolved quickly and in an appropriate manner.
- 3.5 The pastoral structures are led by a senior member of staff who is the designated child protection officer. Staff, both teaching and non-teaching, receive appropriate training in identification of child protection issues and how best to deal with them. All staff provide effective individual support with additional help from the chaplaincy and a specialist independent school counsellor. This broad net provides a secure framework that successfully meets both the needs of the boys and the responsibilities of the school. Policy review is well organised and effective, and co-ordinated through the school pastoral committee. The school meets all legislative requirements concerning race, age, disability and gender discrimination. It carries out all necessary staff checks with great care.
- 3.6 Food is generally of good quality and variety, is plentiful and is, in the main, enjoyed by the pupils. A staff/pupil committee allows the mores of teenage tastes to be aired and debated; it may not be possible to please all the boys all the time. New arrangements this year in the central dining room are still bedding down at lunchtime and the boys, although tolerant of the queues and pressure points, are sometimes rushed. School managers, aware that the dining room environment is not as good as they would like it to be, are making on-going minor changes until the ambience is of the quality expected.

- 3.7 Arrangements to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards are secure. The school has made significant progress since the last inspection, partly in response to regulatory developments but particularly in the light of procedural reviews. A highly effective mix of policy and practice results in thorough and comprehensive risk assessments. Advice and documentation are readily available from the school intranet, fire drills are practised termly, and large numbers of staff are trained and qualified in first aid. All this is underpinned by regular building inspections, policy review and appropriate health and safety committee proceedings. The minor health and safety points referred to at the time of the last inspection have been resolved.
- 3.8 The school now meets its obligations for maintaining registers of attendance, which it did not at the time of the last inspection. Registers are completed electronically at the beginning of the school day and at the start of the afternoon session. The main school office follows up absences and lateness rigorously, using the school's computer network to check each register each day. Tutors and housemasters are fully involved in the process and contact is made with parents on the first day of absence if no communication is received from the boy's home. The process is very efficiently overseen by a senior manager to ensure full compliance with agreed procedures.
- 3.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.10 The school has a strong partnership with parents and outstanding, continually developing links with the wider community. Reporting arrangements have been reviewed and improved since the last inspection, making good use of the school's electronic systems. Further links with parents and the community are being explored and developed. The school's systems are commensurate with the school's aims which refer to the importance of 'the school community of staff, boys and parents', and 'developing strong links with its sister schools and with the community beyond its estate'.
- 3.11 Parents in their questionnaire responses indicated that they were very pleased with the breadth of the curriculum, particularly the extensive programme of extra-curricular activities. A small number expressed some dissatisfaction with provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, and some inconsistencies in the pastoral support provided by a small number of tutors. The inspectors found that the learning support was of a very good quality. Although one or two inconsistencies remain in the way tutors work, the overall provision of pastoral care is excellent.
- 3.12 Parents receive regular, informative reports attesting to their son's work and progress. Each term, full written reports are sent containing summative professional evaluations on academic subjects, which reflect concisely on both achievement and effort. The reports also include extensive pastoral comments from the tutor, housemaster, and the Head Master, who writes about every boy in the school. Parents have the opportunity to attend useful and constructive consultation evenings once a year to discuss their son's progress, twice a year in the case of Year 9. Parents are also welcome to discuss concerns at all other times by arrangement. The excellent use of e-mail and the school's intranet help promote flexibility but the school is fully aware of the importance of retaining face-to-face and oral discussions.
- 3.13 Parents are provided with detailed information about the school including regular, useful newsletters and electronic mail. They have many opportunities to become involved with school activities. An active parents' guild organises the annual leavers' ball and contributes

- to concerts and charity events. The rowing club relies heavily on the enthusiasm and generous contributions of parents.
- 3.14 Written responses to formal parental concerns show that they are handled promptly and with due care and attention. Parents are able to contact teachers by e-mail, enabling problems to be dealt with effectively and at an early stage. Almost all parents have registered their e-mail addresses with the school. The evolving, extensive intranet provides excellent access (by password) to schemes of work and online learning modules.
- 3.15 The school has established outstanding links with the wider community. The commitment to outreach work is substantial. School facilities are made available to a variety of users. The planetarium and observatory are used for children's science study by Brownies and by local school groups, who are sometimes accommodated overnight in a boarding house. The swimming pool hosts disabled swimming events and the library is used for video conferences, linking experts in universities to audiences from the school and others from nearby maintained schools. A learning enrichment project has been started, allying the school with a federation of universities, the local authority, and neighbouring independent and maintained schools to investigate student underachievement.
- 3.16 As part of the expanding community service programme, boys contribute willingly to local primary schools, environmental projects and to the Bedford School Study Centre. The Community, Action and Service element of the IB Diploma course complements this contribution to community life. Links with maintained schools are evident as well: the eminent maths club attracts students from as far away as Luton. Charity events are noteworthy for their frequency and also for their contribution to the development of the boys. Recent initiatives include a fantasy rugby league competition. Boys, staff and parents support these projects wholeheartedly.
- 3.17 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

- 3.18 Boarding provides a very good level of pastoral care in a friendly, positive atmosphere. The facilities and accommodation have improved significantly since the last inspection and the highly committed boarding staff successfully create a family atmosphere. Boarders feel a tremendous sense of loyalty to their house, their fellow boarders and the house staff. The quality of provision is entirely commensurate with the aims of the school.
- 3.19 House-parents and other adults involved in boarding provide care and leadership of the highest order. Relationships within the houses are excellent, both between boarders and staff and among boarders. Care is taken to cater for the needs of minorities, such as providing facilities for private prayer for Muslims and food at appropriate times during Ramadan. Houses have comprehensive boarding handbooks, of considerable assistance to all who wish to know about each house. Appropriate records are kept and access to external sources of assistance is well publicised.
- 3.20 Considerable progress is being made, under current boarding leadership, in ensuring that best practice is adopted in all houses, something referred to in the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) Report of November 2003. Some differences still exist between the houses but many of these reflect their different character. An area of concern relates to the level of authority and ability to punish devolved to senior pupils, which differs between houses. There is no suggestion that this is being misused and significant checks and balances

are in place. However, it is an important difference and progress is being made to eliminate it.

- 3.21 Boarders speak very highly of the boarding experience. Even when pressed, they found it hard to think of anything they wished to change. They spoke of the lack of bullying, with older pupils recognizing the change in attitude that has taken place in this respect since they joined the school. Boys have the opportunity to be involved in the running of their houses through such means as a house committee, which allows year groups to express their views.
- 3.22 Boarders' time is carefully regulated to ensure that adequate provision is given to prep whilst also allowing boys to participate fully in extra-curricular activities. These opportunities are recognised as one of the advantages that boarding offers. Free time is available at the weekend, although Saturdays are occupied by lessons and games fixtures. Almost all boarders talking with enjoyment of either participating in or supporting the latter. Houses provide an interesting programme of trips and activities, such as paint-balling and theatre trips, but there is also a deliberate policy to allow boarders their own personal space to relax. This is important in a busy community such as Bedford School and an important experience for those shortly to go to university.
- 3.23 The quality of accommodation in the boarding houses has improved significantly since the last inspection, is generally very good and in some areas outstanding. Social areas and common rooms have been recently re-decorated, with artwork and photographs on display. The school is aware of differences between the houses and is working hard to bring them all up to the highest standards. The houses have excellent computer facilities, both in terms of their quantity and the provision of wireless networks for those with laptops. Networking allows boarders access to the school intranet, which is a significant benefit when they are undertaking prep and in communicating with friends and family. Social areas are spacious and the houses are well resourced with table-tennis, table-football and snooker tables, televisions, DVD players and all the other amenities which they might have at home. The parental questionnaires raised some concerns over the food but discussion with boarders showed that the majority thought it had improved recently and inspection findings confirmed that meals are satisfactory.
- 3.24 Accommodation, study and leisure facilities in the study centre for pupils for whom English is an additional language is of high quality. Pupils are mainly housed in spacious double rooms. Excellent recreational facilities are available and the pupils have use of school facilities such as the sports hall. Meals are taken in the school dining hall and relations between school and study centre pupils are warm, friendly and helpful.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Governors provide strong support, responding to the school aims and challenging the Head Master and his staff, helping to maintain the high standard of education provided.
- 4.2 Governance is successful but also complex, in that the Harpur Trust, the parent charity responsible for Bedford School, is also responsible for four other schools. In addition, it has a significant grant-providing role to worthy causes in the Bedford area. The strategic plan of the Trust is the foundation upon which the school's own development plans are built. The school's governing body, the Bedford School Committee, is a sub-committee of the Harpur Trust, comprising some Trustees, as well as governors co-opted specifically to govern Bedford School. This group has devolved powers to deal with most matters concerning the school and is supported by three further sub-committees. The structure is effective in maintaining an oversight of the school but is demanding of time, for both the Head Master and his senior staff. The school benefits from membership of the Harpur Trust through, for example, the provision of human resources expertise by central staff. Governors have a wide range of experience which is of great benefit to the school, though with less school education expertise amongst the group than could be useful.
- 4.3 Governors are very well informed and fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. They subscribe to the aims of the school, and know its many strengths, innovations in hand and areas for development. A close oversight of the school's effective financial arrangements is ensuring efficient use of available funds. Governors understand the constraints placed on school expenditure through the Trust's decision to cap school fees and to transfer to the school, over the next five years, responsibility for boys' fee bursaries. Appropriate arrangements are in hand to ensure 'excellence in education' is maintained, a key objective of the Trust.
- 4.4 Relationships between governors and staff are positive and supportive. Mutual respect is achieved through open and frank communication. Governors receive numerous very helpful reports from the Head Master and his senior staff, and request additional documentation as needed. Governors are frequent visitors to the school, meet staff in the common room and observe much that is taking place. They are fully aware of their role as 'critical friends', holding staff to account for success in achieving the school aims.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 Leadership and management are very successful in providing a clear and appropriate educational direction, responding to the school's aims. The three main strands of the aims, academic excellence, outstanding personal development and the provision of a high quality general education, are at the hub of all that takes place. Leaders have responded well to most areas identified at the time of the last inspection report, maintaining strengths and making improvements in areas where needed.
- 4.6 The Head Master provides highly effective leadership, which is strong, relatively formal and innovative. He maintains an excellent overview of all aspects of school life, providing a very effective strategic direction. He is passionate about maximising the boys' opportunities whilst at school, in preparation for their adult lives. No stone is left unturned in his pursuit of this objective! The school's self evaluation refers to a 'can-do culture', 'a sense of community' and 'courtesy and respect', all elements of school life seen by inspectors. Senior

- colleagues provide excellent, loyal support to the Head Master, subscribing to the same vision of excellence. Members of the senior team have complementary skills and work together effectively for the benefit of the boys. Pressures on the relatively small senior team are substantial and managers are pressed at times to implement and monitor all their areas of responsibility, to the high standard they wish to attain.
- 4.7 Effective development planning is seen in the outcomes the school achieves. A thorough analysis of needs precedes synthesis of ideas into the main thrusts for development. Planning is not static, but dynamic, evolving over time as contexts and priorities change. The current ten statements of intent, including ensuring fitness for purpose of the school management structure, are an indication of the strength of the school's self-evaluation. Departmental development planning is not of such high quality as that for the whole school.
- 4.8 Detailed and informative data on pupil performance are analysed by senior managers and used to promote high pupil achievement. Discussions with subject leaders help them to appreciate the worth of such data. Heads of department generally make good use of this information, but the picture is inconsistent. Where underachievement is identified, senior managers provide useful support for individual pupils, who make substantial progress.
- 4.9 School policies are detailed and helpful, covering all areas of school life. Staff have easy access to up-to-date documentation on the intranet. Communication in the school is enhanced by efficient e-mail usage. Staff have numerous opportunities, such as weekly staff meetings, academic and pastoral groups, housemasters' meetings, and an ICT committee, to become involved in a range of initiatives. The boys participate in a number of groups, such as the food and charities committees, and their voices are heard.
- 4.10 The school has invested a substantial amount of time preparing and instigating a transparent appointments policy. Job descriptions have been clarified and roles specified. This has been an important pre-cursor to improving the school's professional review and training procedures. Newly qualified, graduate and unqualified teachers are provided with the help and guidance they require through good, structured in-service training. The programme of induction for more experienced colleagues is satisfactory and under review, with the intention of providing greater structure and consistency. Staff can request to attend in-service training and several do. The quality of courses attended is evaluated but their impact on teaching and learning is not monitored. A new and potentially good appraisal system for teachers is being piloted. The new system is based on a two-year cycle of self-review, watching colleagues teach and being evaluated by line managers. Outcomes are linked directly to the identified needs of those being appraised. The lack of effective formal appraisal of teaching and learning to date has meant that strengths and areas for improvement of teachers have not always been identified, with consequent shortcomings in continuing professional development.
- 4.11 The school is maintained to a very high order; free of litter and graffiti, with stimulating displays, it provides an extremely pleasant place to live and work. New facilities such as the library and music school complement the refurbished chapel and teaching areas. Some rooms are rather small for their purpose. New ICT facilities are well used by most departments and equipment and books are modern and sufficient to meet the needs of the boys. Staff are very well qualified and meet the needs of the curriculum. Many boys benefit from being taught in small classes by experts in their fields.
- 4.12 School administration is efficient, effective and welcoming. School laboratory and workshop technicians, secretaries, and other support staff are valued and appreciate that they are key members of the school-wide staff team.

- 4.13 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.14 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 The educational experience that boys receive at Bedford School is entirely consistent with the school's aims, which are central to its planning and success. The school has many strengths, and some outstanding aspects. In a few areas, necessary steps have been identified and taken to improve further the quality of education and better meet the needs of pupils. Testimony to its success is the outstanding personal development of the boys, the very good achievement of the large majority of boys in public examinations, and the high quality of their wider education. Boys are considerate and positive learners who strive for greater achievement, aided by good and, at times, outstanding teaching. They are excellent ambassadors for the school. The exceptional range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and music, is much appreciated by the boys and their parents. Sixth form IB programmes are providing an extra dimension to the approach of both staff and boys, as are a number of innovative educational initiatives. Provision for boarders is very good indeed. The school's boarding culture has a very positive impact on the education provided for all pupils. The leadership provided by the Head Master is strategic, driven by the needs of the boys and highly successful. He is passionate about maximising boys' educational opportunities whilst at Bedford. Excellence and enjoyment are key characteristics of much that is taking place.
- 5.2 When the school was last inspected by the Independent School's Inspectorate in 2000, a number of minor issues were identified. Most of these have been dealt with well and the school has made good progress overall. The teacher review and development system was not being fully implemented at the time of the last report. A new system has been introduced after a period of focus on appointment procedures, but is not working at full capacity. This is restricting the progress being made in ironing out unhelpful inconsistencies in practice. A good response has been made to the few boarding issues identified by the Commission for Social Care Inspectors.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 To improve the quality of educational provision, the school should take the following action:
1. expedite the implementation of the school's own, new appraisal system, enabling areas for improvement in departmental leadership and in teaching to be identified, and support to be provided.
- 5.5 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 9th to 12th 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 and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the sanatorium. 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

P. McGregor	Reporting Inspector
M. Allen	Deputy Head, HMC school
F. Angel	Head of Lower School, GSA school
N. Carr	Deputy Head, HMC school
I. Galbraith	Head, HMC school
G. Garrett	Director of Studies, HMC school
R. Howes	Director of Studies, HMC school
I. Yorston	Head of Digital Strategy, HMC school