

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Queen's College

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

Full Name of the School	Queen's College
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Age Range	11 - 18
Gender	Boys and Girls
Inspection Dates	29th January - 1st February, 2007

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills 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 carried out in conjunction with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The CSCI report is available separately (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 Queen's College is one of nine schools owned by the Methodist Church and administered by the Board of Management for Methodist Residential Schools. The governance of the college is delegated to a local governing body and day to day management of the school to the headmaster, who was appointed in September 2001. The school itself was founded in 1843 and is the first independent school to have been established in Taunton. It occupies an attractive site on the south west of the town. The school's central building was built to house the school and includes a fine schoolroom which is now the performing arts centre. Many additional buildings and facilities have been added on the one site to meet the needs of each of the four sections of the college – the Nursery and Pre-prep, the Junior School, the Senior School, and the Sixth Form – and the boarders. The only exception is one of the four senior boarding houses, which occupies a large residential property in an adjoining road.
- 1.2 The school is fully coeducational and the senior section, consisting of the Senior School (Years 7 to 11) and the Sixth Form, currently has 558 pupils (289 boys and 269 girls), of whom 138 are in the Sixth Form (77 boys and 61 girls) and 166 are boarders (86 boys and 80 girls). Pupil numbers are appreciably higher than at the time of the last inspection in February 2001. Almost all pupils in Year 6 of the Junior School continue into Year 7 in the Senior School and approximately half that number come from outside. A further group joins the school in Year 9, often from local boarding preparatory schools, so that the school increases from a four form entry to five forms in Year 9 and above. While most day pupils come from homes in Taunton or nearby, boarders are from further afield, a number from service families or families based abroad, and some overseas students from Asia, Europe and Africa. A further 40 do not have English as their first language and most of these receive extra support. A small proportion of pupils usually leaves after GCSE in Year 11 but a number also join the Sixth Form from outside. The school offers a large number of bursaries and scholarships, in addition to the government armed services and Foreign Office allowances. Approximately one-third of pupils in the school benefits from these discounts in fees.
- 1.3 Standardised tests taken each year in Year 7 indicate that the ability of the majority of pupils lies in the top half of ability nationally with approximately one-tenth below that, but rarely in the bottom quarter. Often, between a half and two-thirds of pupils are in the top quarter of the ability range nationally. Thus pupils' ability is well above the national average and, if pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results will be well above the average for all maintained secondary schools. The school has identified 90 pupils who have had special learning needs at some time in their school career and, of these, 60 currently receive extra support.
- 1.4 The school's mission and aims are set for all its schools by the Board of Management for Methodist Residential Schools: "The Methodist Church is engaged in education as part of its Christian missions in the world. Its schools will seek to extend the Methodist ethos and character and contribute to diversity in education." The aims for its schools are: "to be caring Christian family communities committed to the development of the full potential of each individual....; to maintain high educational standards in all their academic, cultural and sporting activities, stimulating excitement in learning and discipline in study....; to work with and in the communities they serve; to worship as Christians in the Methodist tradition; to uphold Christian values in practice and to make religious education a strong feature of the curriculum, whilst welcoming members of other faiths and none....; to encourage pupils in a

critical examination of the standards and values current in society and to discover and develop a personal faith to guide them throughout their lives.” The school’s prospectus sets out its aims to achieve “a friendly and relaxed atmosphere based on the quality of relationships between staff and pupils, a sense of purpose and a passion for learning. Individuals are to be valued and enjoyed irrespective of their age and status in the school ... Christian attitudes are central to the life of the school and a broad range of opportunities inside and outside the classroom are offered so that all pupils can find an activity to match their particular interests and talents ... The development of self discipline and a balanced work ethic, and the exercise of leadership are priorities.”

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

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The education offered reflects the aims and philosophy of the school. The school provides a broad, high quality experience which caters well for the needs and abilities of its pupils, and meets the expectations of their parents. The curriculum quality shown at the previous inspection has been more than maintained. Day and boarding pupils benefit from a friendly and supportive atmosphere that complements the educational provision. Many expressed their satisfaction with the curriculum and the abundant opportunities provided for them.
- 2.2 The school is effective in promoting the intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical and creative development of the pupils. The curriculum is broad and balanced. At GCSE, pupils are able to choose from a wide range of options while maintaining a sensible core of subjects. Three sciences are available as well as dual award science. This curriculum provides a sound foundation for later specialisation. A very wide choice of subjects at AS and A level is available in a variety of combinations.
- 2.3 The curriculum is organised to provide an appropriate programme for all pupils. The education offered makes sound provision for the acquisition of literacy, numeracy, speaking and listening skills, as well as of other subject-related skills in creative and practical subjects. In Years 7 to 11, some subjects are taught in sets by ability and others are taught with some setted groups and some mixed ability groups. Pupils are streamed on entry on the basis of information provided by feeder schools and care is taken to adjust setting whenever appropriate. These arrangements help to give equality of access and opportunity for all pupils. Information and communication technology (ICT) use is supporting both teaching and learning through the use of interactive whiteboards and greater access to ICT for pupils. Challenges at GCSE level to higher ability pupils include teaching matched to ability and the opportunity to take an additional GCSE subject. At A level, some subjects provide an innovative use of ICT to create a virtual learning environment, and organisational skills, personal responsibility and independent learning are developed further.
- 2.4 Extra-curricular provision is of high quality particularly in sport, music and expressive arts, and affords many opportunities for pupils to enrich their education beyond the formal curriculum. These activities are important to the personal development of pupils, promoting feelings of self worth, personal responsibility and the ability to work in and for teams. Sport plays a significant part in the lives of many pupils. Approximately half the pupils learn a musical instrument and join the many orchestral and group music activities. Clubs cater for many other interests, including the creative and academic. An excellent programme of activities at the weekend ranges from art to an impressive and popular programme of outdoor pursuits. Almost all of Year 10 take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's bronze award scheme which gives early opportunities for pupils to develop leadership, commitment, and self discipline. Many carry on through the silver and gold awards. An extensive programme of educational school trips and visits is organised in this country and abroad, for example to the Eden Project, to Iceland for geography and to Venice for art. This co-curricular programme contributes significantly to the school's overall ethos.
- 2.5 Pupils are prepared for the challenges they will meet as teenagers and in their adult lives, through discussion of important social, moral and ethical issues and through the Christian context of the school. The House system is the vehicle for providing advice in making academic and co-curricular choices and for support for personal development, throughout a pupil's time at school. A useful taught personal, social, health and moral education (PSHME) programme is provided up to Year 11, and will be extended to the Sixth Form in

due course. Good opportunities exist to take on responsibilities and develop leadership and team building skills.

- 2.6 The careers programme begins in Year 8 with an investigation of the world of work and the 'take your child to work' day. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 take part in detailed careers investigations, attend a careers convention and have the opportunity of a week of work experience in Year 11. Effective advice is offered to the Sixth Form about opportunities beyond school through discussions, the use of software and personal interviews in school. Their ideas are supported further by visiting speakers and a Higher Education Fair. Tutors and the careers staff ensure that a range of relevant information is available to all. Tutors guide pupils through the application process to universities and other higher education.
- 2.7 The curriculum benefits from a well-organised planning regime. While heads of departments plan and oversee the implementation of short-term curriculum plans, senior management consult widely in formulating the long-term planning of the school's education provision. The curriculum committee, one of many planning committees with open staff membership, has a particular role in deciding the shape of education at Queen's for the future. A new approach to PSHME throughout the school for September 2007 is a recent initiative. Curriculum planning and its implementation ensure equality of access to a wide range of activities for all pupils both in and out of the classroom.
- 2.8 The learning support department makes very effective provision for pupils in need of such support. The school screens pupils on entry at Years 7 and 9 and many pupils receive additional individual lessons and extra time in examinations. All staff are made aware of pupils who need particular assistance, and learning support staff give advice to teachers that is both general and specific to individuals. Pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate additional tuition through individual lessons. EAL pupils still needing individual lessons in Years 10 and 11 have a slightly reduced timetable. Interactive whiteboards are being used effectively by some teachers to support these pupils.
- 2.9 Gifted and talented pupils are provided for both in and out of the classroom. A designated member of staff oversees this provision. Up to GCSE, gifted and talented pupils are taught in sets with a curriculum of greater depth and breadth. Provision outside the normal curriculum includes a politics and philosophy day planned for these pupils along with gifted and talented pupils from a local maintained school. In the Sixth Form, subject departments offer preparation for application to Oxford and Cambridge and differentiated material and tasks for the most able pupils. Subject challenges, Olympiads, competitions and the opportunity to take Advanced Extension Awards further enhance the opportunities for gifted and talented pupils.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.11 The quality of pupils' learning, their attainment and progress are good. The school achieves its aim of providing a firm grounding of knowledge, understanding and skills across a wide variety of subjects and activities. The level of attainment and the quality of learning have risen further since the last inspection.
- 2.12 Creative work of high standard was widely seen, for example in theatre studies, art and English. Pupils also think critically and respond intelligently: examples seen include a Year 9 group in religious studies discussing the existence of God, and the critical thinking activity using distance learning. The smooth transition from GCSE to A level work exemplifies the

effectiveness of the academic education up to Year 11. Many activities reflect high levels of attainment and progress, for example in music and in areas of social and personal development.

- 2.13 Groups of pupils of different abilities make equally good progress. Streaming facilitates the giving of suitable challenges to those of differing abilities. In mathematics, French and GCSE sciences, setting is used to provide courses suited to the range of pupil aptitudes. Those less fluent in English and those with particular learning needs also make good progress as a result of the targeted teaching they receive.
- 2.14 Results in external examinations have shown a consistent upward trend in recent years and are good in relation to pupils' overall range of ability, which is wider than the average in selective maintained schools. At GCSE, overall grades are above the average for selective schools nationally and show that pupils have made significant progress during their time in the Senior School. At A level, where the school's ability range is considerably wider than in selective schools, results in most subjects have been equal to the average in selective schools nationally over recent years. In 2006, results were higher still; almost four out of five of the grades achieved were A or B. In the Sixth Form too, pupils' progress is well above the national average. Pupils whose first language is not English achieve very good results in their EAL examinations, particularly those in Years 12 and 13.
- 2.15 The school rightly takes pride in the progress achieved by all its pupils rather than concentrating on the very high achievements of a few. Nevertheless, examples of the latter are plentiful. This year's Sixth Form has gained seven Oxford and Cambridge offers in a range of subjects. Approximately fifteen pupils gain The Duke of Edinburgh's Award at gold level each year. In 2006, one pupil in Spanish and two in mathematics achieved full marks in all three AS modules and, at GCSE, six entries were in the top five marks nationally. Sports teams consistently achieve high standards and a number of pupils each year, in a number of different sports, go on to achieve county or national honours or join major club academies. Distinctive success is achieved by pupils in music, art, dance and drama.
- 2.16 Pupils acquire the skills they need for effective study. They articulate their thoughts clearly and engage well in class both with staff and with their peers. They respond well to questions and in most cases listen attentively in assemblies and in class discussion. They learn to read with care and understanding. Written communication is fluent. For example, well-constructed essays were seen in geography and history in Year 11. In Year 7, weekly literacy lessons set a sound grounding in the use of English. The standard of numeracy is generally good. Effective use of mathematical concepts was seen, for example in an understanding of graphs and correlation in geography and in applications of mechanics and statistics in science. Pupils appreciate the relevance of mathematics and all, including the less able pupils, are able to initiate its use in applications in their own work.
- 2.17 The growth in the provision and effective use of ICT by both pupils and staff since the last inspection has been marked. The BTEC course in Years 7 to 9 involves work in a range of subjects and enables pupils to gain an external qualification. In addition to software applications, pupils also gain some experience of control technology. Many continue to use ICT confidently and appropriately in their work as they move on through the school. In a Year 9 project on volcanoes, pupils were able to make their own decisions on the choice of project and on the use they would make of ICT to enhance their work.
- 2.18 Many older pupils manage their own learning. They are beginning to acquire a wider range of study skills which enable them to plan their work, take effective notes and decide between

different learning methods. A Year 8 class showed initiative in making their own choices of appropriate machinery for a cutting and sanding task, and many pupils in the lower part of the school learn to make good use of their planners. Virtual learning in economics and video-linked interactive tuition, for example in critical thinking, are adding new dimensions to learning styles and encouraging effective independent learning.

- 2.19 Pupils settle well in lessons and apply themselves quickly to study. They maintain concentration when faced with a challenge and frequently express their enthusiasm and enjoyment. They work well with each other on class projects and exercises, in practical work in science and in teams and group work in sport. In lessons they are constructive in discussion and cooperative in sharing ideas. Pupils behave very well in class, and they also undertake research and homework thoroughly and effectively.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.20 Pupils' personal development continues to be a strength, very much in accordance with the school's aims. The school makes high quality provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. A wide range of opportunities created by a caring and dedicated staff ensures the promotion of a strong moral code, an awareness of the spiritual, a strong social responsibility and a respect for cultural differences. Pupils are open, tolerant, friendly and self disciplined.
- 2.21 The nurturing of the pupils' spirituality is regarded as important and pupils' spiritual development is clearly apparent. Many staff act as impressive role models. The school proclaims and explains the Christian faith in its weekly school services, and, true to its Methodist tradition, is inclusive in its teachings. Worship also takes place in churches in Taunton. In school, the Sixth Form Society brings in a wide variety of speakers and Crossfire allows pupils regular opportunities in which to debate Christianity's place in contemporary society. Xcite and Xamine are Christian groups for Years 7 to 11, led by four members of staff. The chaplain, headmaster and deputy head lead the regular school assemblies; many of these focus on personal belief and morals, and encourage pupils to ask themselves questions about the nature of faith. Pupils' sense of the spiritual is seen also, for example, in the high quality artwork displayed throughout the main school buildings and in the boarding houses. Drama lessons foster self-awareness by providing occasions on which pupils reflect on emotions and behaviour, and learn from that reflection. In English, creative writing encourages pupils to empathise with the lives of others whilst exploring and developing their own values.
- 2.22 Pupils' moral sense is well developed and mature. Staff also play a significant role in the pupils' moral development. Opportunities to discuss moral issues are plentiful. Spoken and written debates are held on such wide-ranging topics as cloning, fertility issues, crime and punishment, and global warming, whilst ethics is a central feature of the religious education curriculum. Moral issues are given a high profile in assemblies. Pupils respect and consider each others' needs; tutor time is used to raise awareness, and support for charities is a continuing feature of house activities.
- 2.23 The development of a social contribution and sense of responsibility is much in evidence. From the moment that they become members of the school community, pupils are actively encouraged to contribute to its corporate life. Many enjoy the wide-ranging extra-curricular opportunities. More specific elements of citizenship are included in the PSHME programme and in other subjects. Pupils value each others' talents and develop team skills through performing arts and in the games programme, in particular. In tutor time they appreciate

advice given, relate well to each other, share opinions, and are encouraged to show initiative. The Fairtrade café, run by Years 10 and 11, is a philanthropic product of their enterprise.

- 2.24 Opportunities for leadership through house responsibilities are given to Year 11 in the day houses; all Year 12 are assistant school prefects, and the Year 13 prefects are chosen after a rigorous application and selection process. The latter's training includes a team-building session, and their prefect contract underlines the importance of leadership by example. Pupil representation on the school council and the Use of Space planning committee underlines the importance that the staff give to a responsible pupil voice. Pupils are encouraged to be outward looking and involve themselves in the life of the community. Local work experience is available to Year 11 and those participating in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme are involved in community service. Pupils have a significant role in the school's annual Quartz arts festival, which welcomes members of the public to the school.
- 2.25 Pupils' cultural development is good. Throughout the school community, there are many signs that Queen's celebrates its own creativity and imagination. *Queen's News* and *The Wyvern* both publish creative writing and artistic highlights; posters advertising school productions adorn Queen's Hall; music of all kinds, in groups or to support the dance activities, adds to the lively, purposeful atmosphere in the school and celebrates its culture.
- 2.26 Whilst valuing contact with the immediate school community, pupils are also appreciative of others' cultures and customs. European educational visits provide frequent direct experience. The major world religions are explored in religious studies lessons and there are numerous occasions within the curriculum when the examination of both one's own and others' cultural assumptions is encouraged. This was seen very clearly in a Year 13 theatre studies lesson in which pupils were exploring how and why prejudice can grow.
- 2.27 One-third of boarders is from overseas and these pupils are fully integrated within the boarding houses. Through friendships, pupils learn to respect each others' beliefs and cultures. The Chinese New Year is celebrated and, through the World AIMS Methodist schools initiative, the school has forged close links with The Gambia. Sixth formers visit projects and are welcomed by their Gambian pen friends during the Easter holidays.
- 2.28 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.29 The quality of teaching is of a good standard overall and none is less than satisfactory. During the inspection, teaching in nearly three-quarters of lessons was good or better. Pupils enjoy lessons and make good progress. A number of initiatives in teaching methods and the exploration of different patterns of learning have been introduced in recent months.
- 2.30 Teaching enables pupils of all abilities to achieve success. Good provision was seen for the more able pupils in some subjects, both inside and outside lessons: for example, in a lively, intelligent discussion on *Animal Farm* in Year 8, in open ended tasks in French and in enjoyable and challenging chemical word puzzles in science. Pupils are encouraged to enter mathematics and science Olympiads, and Oxford history essay competitions. Teachers are conscious of which pupils have particular learning needs and are advised of strategies to help with their learning, as well as providing individual assistance. Help is also given through sensitive marking. Teachers seek advice from the EAL expert for individual pupils and sometimes, for example in biology, glossaries of subject vocabulary are provided.

- 2.31 Much teaching motivates pupils through praise, encouragement and good transfer of skills and fulfils the school's aims. Fine examples of this were seen in the coaching of games, in some excellent art work, in extra challenge for Year 11's top mathematicians and in the fostering of independent learning from Year 7 upwards. Much has been done to encourage independent learning through the increased use of ICT, for example in the use of a website for A level biology and in the virtual environment developed in economics. As well as a number of well-equipped computer rooms, the Sixth Form have the senior resource centre to work in and Years 7 to 11 have the use of the learning resource centre. Pupils of all ages are taught to use the internet and the school's intranet to good purpose.
- 2.32 Teachers work extremely hard for the pupils. Good planning ensures that most lessons run at an efficient pace. In economics, software and a great deal of planning have been used to provide pupils with the means to prepare for their lessons by reading and acquiring knowledge so that class time can be used for more advanced skills. The system of peer review of lessons encourages staff to consider how they teach and to share good practice. Many teachers use a variety of teaching methods. This often leads to pacy and interesting lessons, and increasingly to effective learning by all abilities within the class. However, in some lessons the teaching approach is not so well matched to the particular needs of some pupils or the particular stage they have reached in their learning.
- 2.33 Relationships between staff and pupils are courteous, relaxed and friendly, enabling classroom management to be carried out with a light touch. Teachers undoubtedly know their pupils well. One-to-one help is frequently given and pupils are confident in asking for assistance. Teachers are well qualified and secure in their knowledge and understanding of their subject matter. The pupils have confidence in the teaching and in their teachers.
- 2.34 Departments are well resourced and these resources are generally used to good effect. Many departments have interactive whiteboards and these are increasingly well used. ICT and internet resources are good. The provision of the two learning resource centres has been a marked improvement since the last inspection. However, the division makes it difficult to develop a fully satisfactory library service for all age groups and to give teachers confidence in its potential benefits for pupils' learning. The resource centre for Years 7 to 11, in particular, is quite small for the numbers in these years and, in a number of subject areas, inadequately stocked to excite all ages and abilities. Although these resources are supplemented by stocks in some departments, they are not so easily accessible and little encouragement is given to pupils to use the full library resources effectively, apart from a limited study skills programme in Year 11.
- 2.35 The school marking and homework policy, and the grades for effort and attainment described there, are well understood, and used in half-termly and end of term reports. Nonetheless, many departments, and indeed individual teachers, have their own systems for marking and grading homework, which again are well understood by pupils. Most work is marked regularly and teachers use information from pupils' work to inform the plan for their next lesson. Encouraging comments are favoured by some, at the end of a piece of work, but more detailed comments to indicate to pupils how to improve are less widely used.
- 2.36 Departments have a variety of data on which to base measures of progress, including some from standardised testing. School evaluation of pupils' performance is done mainly through continuous grading, and school tests and examinations. Target setting is used with pupils at all levels in the school and, again, the pupils find this helpful. More detailed use could be made of some data, and the assessment and targeting process could be further refined.
- 2.37 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

- 3.1 Pastoral care remains a strength of the school, developing and building on the high standards reported in the 2001 inspection report. The highest quality of pastoral care is central to the school's aims and its successful achievement is recognised by both pupils and their parents. Pupils are supported very well and sound guidance is given at all stages, both generally and one-to-one through the tutor system. Pupils are proud and supportive of their school.
- 3.2 The house system provides the framework for the school's care scheme. Houseparents and tutors get to know those in their charge extremely well, helped by the small numbers in most tutor groups. The whole system is overseen by the chaplain, the deputy head and the assistant head (pastoral) and supported by a number of other staff such as the school nurse and the heads of learning support and EAL. Problems are thus identified and addressed speedily and, where appropriate, parents can be quickly informed. A pupil with a problem has several options in seeking help and the school's poster *Who is there to support you?* illustrates the care taken over pastoral matters. Similarly the detailed policy on counselling is a very useful document for all those engaged as tutors. As well as their friends, pupils readily turn to their tutors, but many too would turn to the chaplain, deputy head, assistant head (pastoral), houseparent or another member of staff, demonstrating the reality of the school's aim to foster a truly supportive community.
- 3.3 The recent changes to the house system have removed the Sixth Form day pupils from the houses and given greater identity to the Sixth Form. Although many aspects of the change have been welcomed, inevitably this has met with some disappointment on the part of the day pupils in the year groups caught up in the transition, some of whom have missed the opportunity for responsibility within the day houses. Younger pupils tend to express more positive reactions and staff have noticed a change in attitude in Year 11, as they realise new opportunities for house responsibility. New Year 11 heads of houses are proud of their role and others have noted the readiness of other Year 11 pupils to look out for younger pupils in the house. Sixth formers still have opportunities to mentor younger pupils, and prefects from Years 12 and 13 have an important role in supervision and pastoral care.
- 3.4 Throughout the school, relationships between staff and pupils are relaxed and happy, with much goodwill on both sides. Similarly, pupils work well together, and around the school they are friendly to each other and welcoming to visitors. Behaviour is good throughout the school and serious breaches of the rules are rare. Suspensions, temporary or permanent, can be used if necessary and an effective range of sanctions exists for lesser offences. These are balanced by a system of rewards designed to recognise excellence in many facets of school life, including contribution to the community as well as achievement academically or, for example, in music or sport. Pupils understand the rules, and accept the sanctions and rewards as appropriate and for the most part fairly applied.
- 3.5 The school has a clear anti-bullying policy. Bullying is rare but pupils said that when incidents occur they are resolved speedily by senior staff. The school sets high standards for child protection. Staff are updated by regular in-service training and by published updates. The assistant head (pastoral) is the child protection officer and has undergone the appropriate training. The school fulfils its legal obligations for pupil admissions and for daily registration.

- 3.6 Pupils' medical needs are ably handled by the school nurse in the medical centre, where 24 hour cover is provided. The location, layout and decorative state of the centre are not ideal, but there is no doubt of the expertise and commitment of the medical staff. The school catering is mostly of a good standard. Lunch, with its salad bar and choice of hot meals, is of good quality and an excellent service is provided for special events, such as team teas. The school is now seeking to address some recent concerns about the meals provided for boarders.
- 3.7 Health and safety arrangements are good. The committee meets regularly and the governors are represented on this committee. All required documentation and risk assessments are in place, including appropriate measures to reduce risk from fire. A recent visit by the fire officer to the boarding houses resulted in a small number of recommendations which the school has addressed. The school has fully satisfactory arrangements for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities.
- 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 enjoys a good relationship with its parents who are able to take up a wide range of opportunities to become involved in their children's education. The school communicates regularly and well with parents; their concerns are heard and responded to. Links with the local community have been successfully built on in recent years. Since the last inspection, the school has reviewed the reporting system to provide more information to parents and to record a much fuller picture of the pupils' achievements.
- 3.10 Parents, in the pre-inspection questionnaire, were strongly supportive of what the school sets out to achieve and they expressed a high level of satisfaction with the education and support provided. They were especially pleased with the pastoral care, and they were also very happy with the academic and boarding provision. The range and quality of the co-curricular programme was strongly endorsed, and the school's ethos and attitudes praised. A small number of concerns were expressed about the information received about pupils' progress, about homework, about parents' opportunities to be involved in the school and over the way their concerns had been dealt with. The inspection did not find any significant shortcomings in any of these areas.
- 3.11 Parents enjoy the many opportunities to be involved in activities in the school. They are welcomed and encouraged to attend matches, concerts, plays and talks. Some are involved backstage or front-of-house with school productions. Others have helped with the canoeing activity. The Friends of Queen's College play an active role in the school. They attend the open days to meet prospective parents. They host events for pupils and parents, organising social events such as the summer ball. The Friends also participate in occasional fund raising to provide items that will enhance life at school.
- 3.12 Parents are kept well informed about the work and progress of their children. On a daily basis, pupil planners tell them about their children's work and allow parents to pass a written comment back to tutors. The school has also distributed the email addresses of staff, and this is appreciated by parents as a means of easy and effective communication with teachers and tutors. Interim reports are sent out at the end of half terms and provide a useful indication of effort and attainment. End-of-term reports are clear and useful, and cover the full range of each pupil's education and development. Parents also discuss their children's work and progress at the annual parents' evenings.

- 3.13 A comprehensive website contains much useful and up to date information about what is going on in the school. Other information appears in the headmaster's monthly newsletter. The termly *Queen's News* records and celebrates pupils' achievements and provides information about events happening each term, while the annual *Wyvern* magazine provides a colourful record of the school year. The Parents' Handbook provides useful information on a range of topics from health and medical treatment to music lessons, and parents receive detailed information about GCSE and A level options.
- 3.14 The school handles the concerns of parents with due care and nearly all parents are satisfied with the way concerns are handled and resolved. The headmaster and staff are seen to be very easily approachable. The school has an appropriate formal complaints procedure available to all parents.
- 3.15 The school has made a conscious attempt to build closer positive links with the local community. Many of these links involve the pupils. One of the most successful initiatives is the Quartz Festival run by the school for 10 days during the autumn term, which has attracted a wide range of artists and performers, and has brought many local people to the school. A useful partnership has recently been established with a local maintained school to benefit the gifted and talented pupils in both schools. Pupils are encouraged to contribute to the local community through activities such as working in a local charity shop or helping with training at a local canoe club. Many also do work experience locally, including those in Year 8 who take part in the 'Take Your Children to Work' day. Various music groups play at local churches and at charity events. The school makes many of its facilities available to the local community. A range of groups use the Queen's Hall and the sports facilities, including the swimming pool. Local people join pupils and parents to sing with the Choral Society. The school also has overseas links with the Gambia and in Europe through exchanges and visits.
- 3.16 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

- 3.17 The school is committed to boarding education and many of the school's aims for pupils are met through boarding and the boarding ethos. In particular, the aim to provide 'Christian family communities', is successfully achieved in the boarding houses. Boarders enjoy a high level of care and support, and benefit greatly from their educational experience. Boarding plays a significant part in the life of the school and has a positive influence on its ethos and on the shape of the day, enriching the life of the whole community. The staff mix and structure of support for boarders have been strengthened since the last inspection.
- 3.18 Boarding provides the pupils with a homely and secure base, where formative and supportive friendships are developed. The accommodation is suitable for the boarders' needs but some houses have not yet enjoyed the programme of refurbishment from which others have benefited. Boarders can take part in a wide range of weekend activities. They are positive about their boarding experience.
- 3.19 Since the last inspection, the appointment of a number of joint houseparents has seen female staff becoming more involved in boarding responsibilities. These partnerships play a key role in the success of the school's provision for boarding. Pupils have excellent relationships with the staff. There is always someone to turn to, be it the houseparents, the tutor or the laundry lady. Good friendships are forged between pupils of diverse

backgrounds. Pupils of different ages enjoy an easy rapport and new pupils feel welcomed. Pupils are supportive of each other.

- 3.20 Since the last inspection and the ending of Saturday morning lessons, weekend activities have been completely reorganised and now provide the boarders with a wide range of opportunities. On Saturday mornings, boarders can opt for activities ranging from cookery to canoe polo. Boarders in Years 7 to 10 are expected to attend, while older pupils have the choice, with a number opting to help to organise an activity. School matches are usually held on Saturday afternoons and every weekend the outdoor pursuits group run activities which are popular with boarders and day pupils alike. On Sundays, a number of trips are arranged each term for those boarders who remain at school and pupils also have the opportunity at weekends to make use of many of the facilities on the campus or simply to relax or catch up with work.
- 3.21 A planned programme of refurbishment of the boarding houses has been started since the last inspection but not yet completed. Where this has been completed, the rooms are well furnished, light and smart. However, two of the houses are still waiting to be refurbished and are in pressing need of attention. In some places urgent repairs are needed. The houses are generally comfortable and suitably spacious. The facilities are extensive and include year group kitchens, TV rooms and games facilities. The houses have their own computers for the boarders to use, most of which are networked to the school system.
- 3.22 The only other concern, raised by a number of parents and pupils, has to do with a lack of choice on some evenings for supper. It was also noted that if pupils arrived back late from an activity there were sometimes no late teas available. The school has this under review.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The school is closely and strongly governed. Eighteen governors form the recently incorporated governing body, acting as trustees and directors. Individuals are nominated by the governing body and are appointed by the Board of Management for Methodist Residential Schools. The governors, while reporting to the board, have full overall responsibility for the school including its financial well-being. Since the last inspection, the governing body has reorganised its structures to work through a number of committees, which are able to focus on particular areas in the direction of the school or to advise the whole board over significant issues as they arise. These arrangements support very well-informed discussion as the basis for the decisions needed for effective oversight of the school and the attainment of the school's aims. The headmaster appreciates the strong support the governors provide for his management and leadership of the school.
- 4.2 The governors are fully acquainted with the achievements of the school and with its needs, as it seeks to build on its current success and meet the challenges facing it. In particular, the governors have very close oversight of the school's finances and of strategic planning in the school. They successfully provide for a very effective education with well-qualified teachers and support staff, and with the appropriate educational resources. Considerable new building and refurbishment has been undertaken in recent years – and presently continues in the new art and drama block and in the boarding houses refurbishment – underpinning the school's continued development. The governors ensure continuity with the school's thinking through their Strategic Vision for the school and their endorsement of the College Plan which derives from it each year, following discussion and proposals generated in the school under the headmaster's leadership.
- 4.3 The governors ensure that they have a good insight into the workings and achievements of the school. They spend time with different sections or departments before governors' meetings. They meet staff socially when they are at the school, as well as receiving presentations by staff on a variety of topics. Many governors also spend time in the school informally, and attend school events. Consequently the governors are generally well known in the school, their work and commitment to its well-being is respected and, for their part, governors are able to affirm the efforts and achievements of staff, and thereby challenge and support the work of staff in the school.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.4 The school is strongly led, so that a real sense is given of mutual support within a community founded on Christian principles, together with the encouragement of individual achievement and rounded personal development. The headmaster's lead and direction is fully shared by the senior leadership group (SLG), across the college as a whole and in the thorough fulfilment of their particular areas of responsibility. In particular, by monitoring, as appraisers in the performance management system, as line managers and as experienced colleagues they provide reliable support, often with a full personal teaching load, for the school's work and for each member of staff. Thus the care of the pupils, the quality of the education and the aims and ethos of the school are very well promoted.
- 4.5 The school's planning is robust and on-going. Each year, all members of staff join a committee of their choice to plan and review different facets of school life. The SLG

coordinate and refine these submissions to form the College Plan which is in turn reviewed and endorsed by the governors. This is an important example of the effectiveness of management structures, new since the last inspection, to keep all staff informed and to give them an input into the future direction of the school. The process of budgeting now being introduced is also encouraging sound planning by heads of department and others. A number of practical links between members of the Senior School and their counterparts in the Junior School, although not yet widespread, help to create continuity between the two schools and mutual respect for the part each plays in Queen's College as a whole.

- 4.6 The quality of leadership and management by houseparents and heads of department is generally good. Houseparents have a central role in the all-round well-being of the pupils and, with their tutors and supporting staff, are responsible for the excellent level of care and guidance the pupils receive. Many heads of department promote effective teaching and learning in their subject areas by closely monitoring and supporting their teams. However, some departments find it difficult to meet regularly to discuss common concerns and to share good practice. Although all heads of department have an annual review with the headmaster, a lack of time has meant too little regular SLG attention to monitoring and supporting the overall quality of subject management and performance. Administration of departments and of curriculum matters is well done. The school has effective procedures, and its work is supported by comprehensive and clearly written policies.
- 4.7 The teaching staff are well qualified and fully committed to pupils' education both inside and outside the classroom, and throughout the week. Induction programmes help new staff and a well-conceived system of performance management affirms the contribution of teaching and non-teaching staff alike, promotes professional development and helps to identify appropriate training. Some recent whole-staff training has focused on the learning needs of individuals in the classroom. The arrangements for newly qualified teachers follow the national guidelines, and Criminal Record Bureau checks and procedures for the recruitment of staff are in place. Notable features of the staff team in the school are the cohesion and mutual support within the common room, and the way in which all staff share as equals in the school community in promoting the welfare of the pupils.
- 4.8 Finances are well managed to secure the best resources for the school, and to develop and improve the facilities. Much has been achieved since the last inspection and the school can now boast a fine campus with well-maintained buildings and grounds, the latest addition being a second artificial pitch. A rolling maintenance programme addresses the constant need for refurbishment, present in any institution, and the development plan has begun to prioritise more significant capital investment for the future. The school is well aware of the importance of the refurbishment of the boarding houses and the rationalisation of space for day pupils, as well as the desirability of a number of new facilities.
- 4.9 The school's administration runs smoothly thanks to the effective partnership between members of the SLG and the headmaster's and office secretaries, and to the good work of the recently reorganised finance office under the finance director and the facilities manager. The marketing director maintains very good communication between the school and the outside world, including the local community.
- 4.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.11 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 The school very successfully matches its aims. Strong pastoral care, excellent relationships between staff and pupils, and among pupils, and full and mature personal development reflect the school's caring, Christian, family ethos. The boarding houses provide a fine educational experience for their pupils. Wide ranging academic, sporting and cultural achievements show the school's success in releasing pupils' full potential across a broad and exciting educational range. The co-curricular programme is particularly impressive. Good teaching encourages and challenges pupils to do their best in a secure, supportive and relaxed environment where all are valued. New approaches to teaching and learning are being introduced, notably with the use of technology, and more attention is now given to the different learning needs of the pupils, although this more individual focus is as yet only partly reflected in pupils' corresponding study skills. Pupils are very well prepared, socially and in what they have achieved, to move on confidently to university and adult life.
- 5.2 Much has been done and much progress made since the last inspection in 2001. The decision to end Saturday lessons has led to radical improvements to the co-curricular programme and has coincided with improved academic performance. The school is strongly led, and effectively managed at all levels. A clear management structure has been developed, both for the school and for the governors. However, a lack of time means that the monitoring and coordination of the work of heads of departments is not yet fully effective in raising still further the standards of teaching and learning across the whole school and in the use of assessment. Since the last inspection, a system of performance management has been introduced, to provide support and recognition for staff, and to promote professional development. Resources for, and the use of, ICT have been greatly enhanced. A limited PSHME programme has been introduced and is now being developed further. A steady addition of new buildings and facilities has been achieved to the great benefit of the pupils, although some library resources are not yet used as well as they should be. The programme of refurbishment in some boarding and day houses is not yet complete.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no significant weaknesses but the following points merit attention at this particular stage in the school's development, as it seeks to improve still further.
1. The school should continue its current focus on the quality of teaching and learning, by all subject departments and by the staff as a whole through considering the following:
 - recent initiatives and developments need to be coordinated and shared right across the school;
 - good practice should be widely shared within and across departments;
 - current ideas and methods should be considered in relation to each subject of the curriculum and in response to different pupils' needs.
 2. The curriculum should be kept under review, the new PSHME programme introduced and even greater use made of assessment for planning and to support pupils' learning.
 3. Ways should be sought further to develop library skills and to encourage better use of the resources centres, especially by younger pupils.
 4. As opportunity offers, the school should complete the boarding houses refurbishment.
- 5.5 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 29th January to 1st February, 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.
- 6.2 National Minimum Boarding Standards were inspected by a team of three Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) inspectors over three days.

List of Inspectors

Mr. Mike Higginbottom	Reporting Inspector
Mrs. Susan Ashby	Deputy head, HMC school
Mrs. Christine Coleman	Former deputy head, GSA school
Mrs. Sarah Dawson	Deputy head, HMC school
Mrs. Judith Kearney	Former director of studies, HMC school
Dr. Gerald South	Former director of studies, HMC school
Mr. Randall Thane	Second master, HMC school