

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Ellesmere College

Full Name of the School	Ellesmere College
DCSF Number	893/6001
Early Years Number	N/A
Registered Charity Number	1103049
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Age Range	7 to 18
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	17th to 20th November 2008

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

The inspection was carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate. The Ofsted report is available separately at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

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

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Characteristics of the School	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION	2
	The Educational Experience Provided	2
	Pupils' Learning and Achievements.....	4
	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils	5
	The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment).....	6
3.	THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS	8
	The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils.....	8
	The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community	9
	The Quality of Boarding Education	11
4.	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT	12
	The Quality of Governance	12
	The Quality of Leadership and Management	12
5.	CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS.....	14
	Overall Conclusions	14
	Next Steps.....	14
6.	SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE	15
	List of Inspectors	15

1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Ellesmere College was founded in 1879 by Canon Nathaniel Woodward as one of a group of Anglican Schools. The aims of the Woodard Schools are: to educate young people for responsibility, leadership and service; to provide a broad and well balanced curriculum and enlightened pastoral care; and to offer an experience of Anglican worship and an understanding of Christian faith and values in a caring community. Pupils of all faiths and none are admitted. Ellesmere College places a particular emphasis on having a largely non-selective entry. The local governing body is autonomous over all issues except the school's overall ethos; its chair is known as Custos. Some governors are also Fellows of the Corporation; the Corporation oversees the strategy and ethos of the group as a whole.
- 1.2 The school is situated in open farming country on the outskirts of Ellesmere, a canal and market town in Shropshire. Initially a boarding school for boys aged 13 to 18, it began to admit younger boys in 1976 and girls in 1970. It is now a fully co-educational school for boarding and day pupils aged 7 to 18. It has no Saturday school, using the time for school matches and other activities. In recent years, it has built a sports hall, refurbished and covered the swimming pool, extended sixth-form boarding provision and increased its grounds from 70 acres to 140 acres, to develop its facilities further. In 2006 it introduced the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB) as an alternative to A levels. The current headmaster has been in post since 1995.
- 1.3 Most day pupils come from north Shropshire and south-west Cheshire, many travelling considerable distances to school. A small, but significant, number come from overseas, in particular Germany and other European countries. Pupils are drawn from a wide range of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds; most parents were not, themselves, at independent schools. About one pupil in six is supported in part by school bursaries and a number of others by allowances from the Ministry of Defence and Foreign Office.
- 1.4 Entrance tests provide a baseline for future monitoring and are used to ensure that pupils will benefit from the education provided, but they are not used competitively. As a result, the range of ability is wide and is, overall, just above the national average. If pupils perform in line with their abilities they will obtain results which are slightly above the national average for all maintained schools. Eighty pupils receive support for a significant learning difficulty or disability (LDD) and, of these, nine have statements of educational needs. One hundred and thirty pupils come from homes where English is an additional language (EAL), of whom 57 need support; many of these are from overseas.
- 1.5 The school is divided into the Lower School, for pupils in Years 4 to 8, and the Senior School, for pupils in Years 9 to 13. The Senior School is further divided into the Middle School and the Sixth Form. At the time of the inspection, there were 182 pupils (111 boys and 71 girls) in the Lower School, and 437 pupils (295 boys and 142 girls) in the Senior School. This total of 619 pupils is a considerable increase on the numbers ten years ago. Of these pupils, 232 (164 boys and 68 girls) are boarders. Most pupils move from one section of the school to the next, and leave after the Sixth Form. Nearly all pupils go on to university when they leave.
- 1.6 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 good quality of education provided is consistent with the College's aim to offer a broad and well-balanced curriculum that affords pupils ample opportunities to become fulfilled, skilful and happy young men and women. Provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) has been improved since the last inspection, since they are no longer withdrawn from English lessons.
- 2.2 Through its wide-ranging curriculum, the school contributes effectively to pupils' linguistic, mathematical, scientific and technological development. It also encourages the successful acquisition of speaking, listening, numeracy and literacy skills. The wide range of options allows a choice of courses well-suited to pupils' individual needs across the full range of ability. For instance, Year 9 options allow pupils to devote sufficient time to their chosen subjects in preparation for GCSE, where nine or ten subjects are studied from over twenty on offer. Pupils also have a wide range of opportunities in the Sixth Form where a generous set of A-level choices has been augmented by the introduction of the IB, which is popular with international students, and a pre-IB year, with its emphasis on English.
- 2.3 The programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is delivered through focus days each term, with some follow-up in tutor periods. These arrangements, a recently introduced innovation, are wide-ranging and appropriate. The programme is well supported by general studies in the Sixth Form, through which a great deal of citizenship education is delivered, and by discussion in other subjects such as religious studies (RS), geography and science. PSHCE and general studies are enhanced by outside speakers. Recently these have included the Bishop of Chester; the local MP, who increased pupils' awareness of government and democracy; and a bailiff, who spoke about the dangers of debt and house re-possession. In the Lower School, tutor periods are used less effectively for PSHCE, but contain sufficient opportunities for activities such as circle time and emotional literacy.
- 2.4 Curricular planning is thorough and based on the principles of breadth and equality of access. In the Sixth Form, both A-level and IB courses are open to all, though the numbers of British pupils opting for the IB are small as yet. Schemes of work are clear and detailed, and they support effective teaching. The allocation of time for subjects and the distribution of lessons through the week are appropriate throughout the school. Smooth progression from the Lower School, through the Middle School to the Sixth Form, is made possible by the good working relationships between key stage coordinators and heads of department.
- 2.5 The outstanding programme of activities is a major strength of the school. The school is justly proud of its extended curriculum, seeing activities and academic work operating in tandem, each supporting the other. The importance the school places on activities is demonstrated by the curriculum time devoted to it in the senior section of the school on Thursday afternoons and by the wide involvement of staff in this well-managed programme. The distinctive Survive and Thrive programme followed by Years 7 and 8 on Wednesday afternoons allows pupils to experience activities as diverse as cookery, public speaking, engineering and climbing. This programme forms an excellent basis, encouraging all pupils to take advantage of the school's varied range of activities throughout their school career.
- 2.6 The rugby, cricket and tennis academy programmes, as well as the Titans swimming club, enable pupils to achieve high standards in sport at all levels. This strength in depth is mirrored by strength in breadth; all pupils participate in a wide-ranging afternoon games programme and the school's extensive games facilities are available for use in the evenings.

- and at weekends. Alongside a wide range of team games, the school encourages wide participation in other sports, such as golf, sailing and archery.
- 2.7 Cultural activities are also a major strength. The Arena Arts programme introduced in 2007 is already an integral part of school life, giving pupils the opportunity to work on an extended artistic project in a medium of their own choice. Drama has developed a high profile: a large number of pupils participate in the house drama festival; in productions such as the Year 10 pantomime, which tours local primary schools; and in classical productions such as the forthcoming production of *Hamlet*. The school also has links through drama with Tabor Academy in Boston and will be touring with *Jane Eyre* in the United States (USA) next year. Many pupils participate in a wide range of musical events. The extent of their interest is shown by mass participation in the house singing competition in the Lent term, by the considerable support for the Battle of the Bands, and by choir performances for organisations such as Age Concern and the Leonard Cheshire Homes. Activities such as learning Greek and debating add to pupils' opportunities.
- 2.8 Around 150 pupils in the Senior School have taken the opportunity to join the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), which gives pupils opportunities to develop leadership skills in all three services and to join expeditions, such as adventure training in Scotland. Around 30 pupils each year also work for the BTEC award through the CCF contingent. Many pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which recognises all-round endeavour; the Gold group enjoy an annual open canoe expedition on the Dordogne. Pupils have opportunities to serve the community, both within the school and in the Ellesmere district. They benefit from the College's international links, demonstrated by the Monduli Green Project, which raises money for school resources in Monduli, Tanzania.
- 2.9 Pupils with LDD and EAL are well supported. Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the specialist support they receive, and how it raises their self-esteem and builds up their confidence. Pupils who are identified as gifted or talented receive more variable support in class, but have exceptional opportunities in activities such as sport.
- 2.10 Pupils with LDD are thoroughly assessed if a difficulty is suspected, and are then provided with appropriate specialist support. However, the school does not make full use of the analysis of data to monitor these pupils' progress. Attitudes towards support for LDD are positive throughout the school; pupils enjoy attending support lessons and almost all their parents say their children are receiving worthwhile help for their needs. Individual education plans (IEPs) are informative and updated regularly. They form the basis of liaison between specialist and subject teachers but the process of checking that subject teachers have read IEPs is not monitored sufficiently rigorously. Support outside specialist lessons is therefore variable and tasks in class are sometimes insufficiently matched to individual needs. The successful programme to improve the motor skills of pupils with dyspraxia is a unique feature of the department. It is impressively run by a committed group of Sixth Form pupils working under the direction of one specialist teacher.
- 2.11 International pupils are provided with rapid and effective language enrichment courses so that they are better equipped to gain full access to the wider curriculum. Good awareness of their individual needs and cultural influences enhances this programme and promotes their progress. Although provision is focussed on teaching, initiatives to foster integration are also encouraged.
- 2.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.13 Pupils develop a wide range of learning skills and demonstrate good standards both in and out of the classroom, reflecting the school's ambition that they should achieve more widely than just in examinations. Pupils with LDD and EAL make more rapid progress than at the time of the last inspection, as a result of the better support they receive.
- 2.14 Pupils achieve well by the time they leave the Lower School, despite initially lacking confidence in some basic skills. By Year 8, they are well grounded in language, though less experienced in creative and extended writing. The most able pupils explore some complex ideas, for example about Henry VIII's motives. They make use of information and communication technology (ICT) in subjects ranging from history to design, though they use it less frequently in some other subjects such as mathematics. They show a good understanding of scientific concepts, use their own narrative to create aboriginal art and are confident swimmers.
- 2.15 As they move towards GCSE, Middle School pupils develop outstanding speaking and listening skills, write with increasing fluency and discuss texts in poetry and prose with insight. They engage in lively discussion across the curriculum and reason clearly in mathematics, though with more variable recall of recent work. They bring their practical skills to bear on work in media, communicate clearly in geography and make full use of their ICT skills in many subjects. Their excellent use of desktop publishing and video editing in both drama and media is combined with an outstanding understanding of performance and a good deal of internet research. Achievement is less in the few lessons where pupils who are constrained by examination techniques fail to use their own skills fully or are unclear about the task set.
- 2.16 High levels of literacy continue to support work in the Sixth Form. In English, pupils apply their analytical skills to their detailed knowledge of the text. Elsewhere, they grasp abstract concepts such as genotypes and complex numbers, and apply theoretical understanding to real life problems in economics. However, some pupils find it hard to move beyond the teachers' notes to think laterally and a few pupils find more abstract concepts difficult. Pupils continue to make good use of ICT in research, in media studies and elsewhere.
- 2.17 Pupils with LDD or EAL progress particularly well as a result of the support they receive. For example, their extended written work demonstrates increasing confidence and assurance as they move through the school. They benefit from technical support from computer programmes, and perform well at GCSE. However, in a number of lessons, pupils for whom work is more difficult progressed slowly as tasks were too hard. In the best lessons, the most able pupils progress well when given the stimulus and challenge that they need.
- 2.18 In national tests at the age of 14, pupils obtain results that are well above the national average for all maintained secondary schools and therefore high for their abilities. Results at GCSE are good for pupils' abilities, since they are above the national average. This good progress is reflected in the school's own analysis based on nationally standardised scores of ability. In the Sixth Form, where the average ability of pupils taking A level nationally is higher than the national average at GCSE, pupils make appropriate progress since the school's results are in line with national averages. This analysis is borne out by standardised measures of progress in the Sixth Form.
- 2.19 School teams gain outstanding success in a wide range of sports, at local, regional and national level. In addition, a significant number of pupils compete at a representative level, with some in national squads; a number reach a high enough standard to play at senior level immediately after leaving school. The school also achieves success in local music festivals,

wins gold, silver and bronze awards in the UK Mathematics Challenges and achieves high standards in dramatic and musical events; the jazz group plays with a lively and striking sound, and the choir produces a high standard of both individual and group singing. The school has reached the Royal National Theatre Connections Regional final for the last three years.

- 2.20 Pupils learn to work independently, producing well-organised files and notes. In many areas they undertake research and wider reading, whilst in others they carry out course and field work to a high standard. However, a number of pupils, from most levels of the school, say they would enjoy additional individual work and challenge, and in some cases students taking A level are given less opportunity for independent work than those taking the IB. In discussion, pupils offer an interesting variety of ideas and ask well-considered questions. Pupils work well with others, both in pairs and larger groups. They share their own experiences openly and respect each other's views. They have a good rapport, both with other pupils and with the teacher.
- 2.21 In almost all lessons, pupils are fully engaged in their work and contribute to the positive working environment. Only in a minority of lessons do they lose focus when not fully engaged, or when the teacher does not sustain stimulating activities for the whole class. Pupils enjoy applying their knowledge to new situations, and respond well to fast paced teaching. They are eager to take part in discussion, think carefully about challenging questions and produce work which is well presented.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.22 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall with outstanding social and moral development. The College meets its aim of seeking to offer an experience of Anglican worship and an understanding of the Christian faith and values within a caring community. The school is drawing more on the diverse experience of its overseas pupils than during the last inspection, but it is aware that there is more work to be done in this respect.
- 2.23 Most pupils appreciate the time for reflection afforded by regular chapel services and value their contribution to the Christian values of the College. The chapel is situated at the heart of the school and through chapel life, the curriculum and the school's general ethos, the College offers its pupils a variety of opportunities to develop spiritual awareness and a strong moral code. However, pupils say they would appreciate clearer explanation of the truths underpinning Christian worship, together with greater opportunity for participation by both pupils and staff in taking services. The College promotes Christian values, and develops respect for other faiths. For example, as part of the PSHCE programme, pupils in the Middle School travel to Manchester to visit places of worship of non-Christian faiths, providing an insight into the traditions of other religions. The spiritual dimension is also explored in RS lessons. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, the issue of divorce was considered from Islamic, Anglican and Roman Catholic perspectives, and pupils responded well to opportunities to express their own views.
- 2.24 The College's approach to moral education is highlighted through its success in educating young people for responsibility, leadership and service. Pupils are aware of their responsibilities to others. For example, Community Action is an effective programme through which projects to encourage charitable giving, environmental responsibility and service to the neighbourhood are organised. Moral and ethical issues are considered within the curriculum. Year 11 pupils in English showed great sensitivity during a discussion of euthanasia and Year 13 pupils in geography considered the issue of immigration, and

discussed how bias and media distortion can influence public perceptions. Pupils display attitudes and behaviour that reflect the positive influence the school has on their characters.

- 2.25 The strong boarding ethos of the College contributes to pupils' considerable social development. The communities in the day and boarding houses are bound by a mutual respect, both between pupils and between pupils and staff. Day pupils feel integrated within these houses; it is quite usual for them to stay until late in the evening and many enjoy occasional nights of boarding. Housemasters, housemistresses and housemothers play a pivotal role and are seen as approachable and sympathetic. Older pupils will sometimes mentor younger ones, for example to help them overcome homesickness. The very effective prefect system at College level is sustained by an outstanding programme of preparation and induction. Other senior pupils act as house captains. Appropriate responsibilities are given to pupils in the Middle and Lower Schools, and an embryonic Eco Committee has been established to promote sustainability through recycling, energy conservation and composting. The vertically grouped competitive houses also enhance the school's community spirit. In addition to inter-house sport, there are frequent house plays, which are pupil-led events involving a high percentage of the school.
- 2.26 Pupils from different cultural backgrounds mix easily socially in their day-to-day life. Examples of the respect and tolerance that pupils show were the celebration of Chinese New Year and an international food-tasting festival when overseas pupils prepared their national dishes for pupils throughout the College to try. Lessons across a range of subjects, together with opportunities for overseas trips such as the sports tour to South Africa, the choir tour to Barcelona and the drama tour to the USA also extend pupils' appreciation of differences between peoples.
- 2.27 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.28 Teaching is good overall. The school makes better use of assessment than at the time of the last inspection, though it knows this is still an area for development. Despite placing a good deal of emphasis on meeting the range of pupils' needs, it is aware that its provision for the most able pupils is not yet sufficiently strong.
- 2.29 Teaching is based on good individual knowledge of pupils and of their needs, as well as of the subject material. Pupils very much appreciate the time and trouble teachers take providing individual support, help and encouragement. However, this knowledge of pupils is not always converted into a programme of work suitable to their differing needs in class.
- 2.30 Much teaching is well planned, with a wide variety of approaches and activities. In some lessons it showed real imagination and ingenuity. For example, introducing pupils to apartheid through a game involving size discrimination or conducting a discussion of marketing by considering baked beans and pork pies not only captured pupils' imaginations but clarified key points well. Short, well-thought-out activities characterise many of the best lessons at all levels of the school and maintain pupils' interest and sense of purpose. However, less good teaching does not have this level of variety, places too much emphasis on worksheets, or lacks clarity about the task or learning intention.
- 2.31 In lessons where questions are closed, teachers talk too much or they do the work for the pupils, who thus have insufficient opportunity to develop their own ideas. However, in the best lessons, teachers provide considerable challenge and independence. In these lessons, questions are open ended, expectations are high, pupils have freedom in the way they

- approach their work, and questioning generates ideas, clarifies understanding and encourages pupils to think.
- 2.32 Pupils with LDD or EAL generally speak highly of the specialist support they receive; this enables them to progress well in relation to their difficulties. In class, the best teaching matches tasks carefully to pupils' differing abilities, with different tasks, higher expectations, and greater challenge for the more able. However, in a few lessons, less able pupils say they find the work too hard or the tasks confusing. Similarly, in some other lessons the most able pupils say they are given the same work as other pupils to do, or that they would welcome the opportunity to work more independently.
- 2.33 In almost all lessons, pupils behave well as a result of implicit expectations to which all aspire. Relationships are good and teachers have a good rapport with their pupils. Resources are used well.
- 2.34 Marking is inconsistent. Less good marking is either infrequent, inaccurate or fails to identify for pupils what they should focus on next. In contrast, the best marking provides pupils with constructive comments and a clear indication of how work might have been improved. Targets are set and monitored, and pupils say they know where they stand.
- 2.35 Assessment of pupils' work is good and particularly strong within the school's system of periodic grades. Information from internal assessments and objective screening tests is used effectively to influence teaching and promote progress through target setting. Periodic grades work well by collating regular performance in attainment and effort. This process, involving pupil, teachers, tutor and parents, gives a clear direction on how to improve.
- 2.36 Cognitive ability tests are used to gather objective data and provide a baseline profile of individuals against which subsequent performance can be predicted and measured for the tracking of pupils' progress. The resulting data is used effectively by senior managers for ability setting, selecting entry tiers for examinations and establishing performance expectations, but the school is aware that classroom teachers have not yet been trained to make fuller use of this data. The appointment of a head of Middle School since the last inspection has already enhanced the dissemination of this information.
- 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 Overall, the quality of pastoral care and welfare is outstanding, supported by thorough health and safety, child protection and fire procedures. The school succeeds in its aim of providing enlightened pastoral care and both the support and monitoring of pupils' progress and development are major strengths. These qualities have been enhanced since the last inspection by the appointment of a head of Middle School and an educational visits coordinator.
- 3.2 The school provides excellent support and guidance to pupils. Parents are delighted with the help and guidance their children receive, commenting that the tutor system helps pupils feel valued and able to relax with their peers and staff. The overwhelming majority of pupils say they enjoy being at school and feel that the school helps them settle in well. Pupils also say there are many people to whom they can turn, including their peers, senior pupils, medical staff, teachers, tutors and house staff. This care, which is extended to every pupil, is supported by effective communication between staff. It aims, in particular, to integrate international and local, day and boarding pupils.
- 3.3 Pastoral systems are well thought out with careful monitoring of, and support for, tutors in their care of pupils. Staff, house and careers handbooks, the staff induction programme and the annual review of each house by the pastoral deputy head ensure that pastoral systems are well understood by all the staff. Tutors are allocated to houses, through which most care is provided, whilst the competitive houses, which cross both gender and age groups, provide personal development opportunities.
- 3.4 Tutors monitor academic performance and behavioural progress well. They play a key role in supporting and guiding pupils by co-ordinating the excellent 'white slip' system which records positive and negative performance by pupils in every aspect of their lives. In addition, pupils' progress is monitored by the head of each section of the school, by their housemaster or housemistress and by both deputies. Tutors also play a significant role in careers guidance, supporting pupils in their subject choices at important moments, and advising and guiding them through their higher education applications.
- 3.5 The high quality of relationships between all members of the community is a strength. Gender and age differences are of little consequence to pupils, who support each other's achievements in music, art, drama and sport. Pupils' achievements are recognised by the school through the awarding of ties for boys and badges for girls. Support staff are very positive and add to the welcoming atmosphere of the College. Prefects contribute to the care and welfare of pupils, both as listeners and as role models. Pupils are at ease with themselves and with one another, as demonstrated in confirmation classes and in discussions with inspectors.
- 3.6 Unacceptable behaviour of any kind is dealt with properly and speedily, in ways that are fully understood by the pupils. However, a few feel that sanctions are sometimes too harsh. Support staff are encouraged to report any unacceptable behaviour on the campus. Detailed monitoring of 'white slips' by the senior management team works well and identifies patterns of behaviour, both in individuals and in groups, which require action. Pupils have full confidence in the school's ability to resolve bullying, on the rare occasions that it occurs.

- 3.7 Appropriate careers guidance prepares pupils well for higher education through PSHCE focus days and the careers convention. A new handbook describes the improved careers and guidance programme that is being implemented. This programme supports pupils in their subject choices in Year 9 and continues to university applications in Year 13. Careers prefects support the head of careers and head of Sixth Form in identifying and dealing with individual career needs. There is good input from parents and ex-pupils to the careers conference.
- 3.8 The school has secure procedures to support pupils' welfare. Child protection measures are thorough and understood by staff. The school has taken proper steps to reduce the risk from fire; an effective evacuation in response to a fire alarm incident took place during the inspection. Arrangements to ensure health and safety are effective and the school has due regard for all health and safety regulations. Since the last inspection, the new external visits co-ordinator has set up appropriate systems and risk assessments for the many school trips and events. Admissions and attendance registers are maintained properly.
- 3.9 The medical centre provides an excellent service, presenting a warm and welcoming environment combined with a proper understanding of confidentiality. A high proportion of staff have received first aid training, with many at a higher level. The school has taken appropriate action to improve access for disabled pupils, and has appropriate plans to develop it further.
- 3.10 Pupils are encouraged to be healthy through developing appropriate eating habits and taking regular exercise. Kitchen staff and Lower School pastoral staff monitor the choice of food made by younger pupils. Since the last inspection, a new kitchen, new serving counters and new menus have been established. Meals are enjoyed and choices are available. However, increased numbers in the school present delays in queuing which some pupils resolve by making purchases from the tuck shop instead of taking school meals.
- 3.11 The activities programme and wide range of school facilities enable all pupils to exercise regularly, and the PSHCE programme re-enforces the importance of a healthy life-style through focus days on body awareness. Many pupils use the fitness gym for which appropriate training and supervision are provided.
- 3.12 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

- 3.13 Links with parents and the community are outstanding. The school has developed further the highly effective partnership with parents and worthwhile links with the community reported at the time of the last inspection.
- 3.14 The parents of about one-third of pupils replied to a questionnaire distributed before the inspection. Parents' responses were overwhelmingly positive, especially about the curriculum, the quality of teaching and progress, the range of extra-curricular activities and the values and attitudes the school inculcates. Inspectors agreed with all of these views. However, a significant minority of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the provision of activities for the less talented, but inspectors found that much is done to organise sports and activities for pupils of all abilities. Parental concerns about the quantity of homework appear to be linked to the transition to Senior School and, although there are undoubtedly challenges in managing the quantity of homework alongside a vigorous activity programme, the majority of pupils feel that the demands are reasonable.

- 3.15 Parents are fully involved in the school and in their children's education. They appreciate the headmaster's vision of the school as embodying more than just the academic and they support its many activities. They frequently attend sporting fixtures and cultural events, such as exhibitions, plays and concerts, at which members of the public are also welcome. The active parents' association encourages new parents to join in and organises a variety of social events through the year, in particular its popular annual ball.
- 3.16 Parents are kept exceptionally well informed about the school. Comprehensive information is sent to parents when a child joins the school. Considerable effort is made to welcome new parents. A recent innovation is the twice termly contact between tutors and parents, preferably by telephone. Meetings for parents are arranged to convey information about GCSE options, A-level choices and university entry. Information booklets provide detailed and helpful information about public examination courses. The informative school magazine helps to keep parents in touch with the life of the school, as does the termly newsletter, which celebrates many successes.
- 3.17 Parents are also kept fully informed about their children's progress. Full written reports are sent home twice a year. These are well presented, carefully written and contain helpful guidance, with newly introduced targets in addition to information about work and progress. These targets are particularly effective when closely linked to examination assessment objectives. Full pastoral reports include comment about extra-curricular involvement with summaries from the tutor, housemaster or head of Lower School, and headmaster. In addition, parents receive grades every half term, which record effort and achievement in a clear and succinct manner. Parents' evenings to discuss progress with teachers are held once a year; however, some parents said that meetings are so popular that it can be difficult to see all the subject teachers. In addition, parents can raise concerns directly with teachers and tutors at any other time. The 'white slip' system of recording particularly good or less good performance by pupils is an efficient way of communicating such issues to parents. The school has appropriate procedures for dealing with concerns and complaints that parents raise.
- 3.18 Widespread and improving links with the community enrich the curriculum and encompass many school activities. For example, Year 10 students perform their annual pantomime at local schools as well as in the Arts Centre. The CCF takes part in the Remembrance Service parade in Ellesmere. Members of the local community attend school carol services and the school choir sometimes combines with a local choral society, for example in a tour to Spain. Some pupils help on a weekly basis at Age Concern, where theatre studies students also interviewed elderly people when doing research for the Reminiscence Theatre. Visiting speakers have enhanced the PSHCE and general studies courses. However, the school is aware that there is scope for the Young Enterprise scheme and work experience to work more closely with Old Ellesmerians and local employers.
- 3.19 School premises are used extensively by outside organisations. Shared use has fostered beneficial links through local sports clubs such as the Titans Swimming Club and the New Saints football team, and the school has hosted singing workshops, science fun days and other events, as well as offering the use of the science laboratories to local primary schools. The sporting academies provide centres of excellence, which are often available to the community through holiday courses. The Arena Arts Centre provides a growing focus of excellence and stages concerts, drama productions and art exhibitions which are popular both within the school and throughout the wider community. The local business community benefits from learning about the IB.

- 3.20 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

- 3.21 The quality of boarding is good. Pupils enjoy boarding and speak positively about the opportunities available. Housemasters and housemistresses, supported by tutors, housemothers and ancillary staff, continue to create the welcoming and encouraging environments in which pupils thrive and support one another. Since the last inspection, a number of significant improvements to accommodation have been made and all the recommendations of the 2007 Commission for Social Care Inspection have been acted on.
- 3.22 Relationships are outstanding in almost all respects, both between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves. Pupils mix easily with each other, regardless of year group or nationality, and they exercise flexibility and cooperation over rooming arrangements. They are content and happy in one another's company. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of boarding pupils from overseas. Other pupils are respectful towards them, but there are some issues of integration and internationalism which, although addressed, have not yet been fully resolved.
- 3.23 Within the houses, there are many opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility, for example as prefects or as part of a rota of house duties. Prefects see their role in pastoral rather than authoritarian terms and are highly respected by their peers and juniors alike. House staff know pupils in their houses well and demonstrate a positive attitude towards them. They are approachable and supportive. Expectations of behaviour are clearly understood by pupils, as shown by the calm working atmosphere during evening prep time and the sense of order in the regular roll calls.
- 3.24 There is a wide range of activities available to boarding pupils. During the week, in addition to the extra-curricular programme provided during core hours, pupils benefit from access to facilities such as the sports centre. A flexible approach to weekend activities is taken. On Saturdays, many pupils are involved in representative sporting fixtures. A programme of other activities is published at the start of each term after consultation with pupils and they choose which ones they will attend. Pupils in Years 10 and below are very strongly encouraged to participate, which they enjoy. Each weekend a trip further afield is offered, such as to Chester or Shrewsbury, the cinema or ice skating. On the whole, pupils are satisfied by the activities available. Younger pupils appreciate being encouraged to take part; older pupils like the freedom to choose for themselves how they can best use their time.
- 3.25 The quality of accommodation is good, overall. The College has plans for the development of the boarding facilities which it is implementing fully. Recent improvements include a new Sixth Form house for boys, an extension to the girls' Sixth Form house and the opening of boarding facilities for pupils in the Lower School. These new facilities are of high quality and have attractive public areas and bedrooms. Within the other houses, some areas look a little tired but there are no signs of neglect. Rooms are spacious and comfortably furnished, and each house has kitchen facilities and a meeting room within which table tennis or similar recreational activities can take place. Maintenance is carried out by staff who are each affiliated to individual houses to encourage their sense of ownership.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Governors provide strong and effective leadership to the school and act quickly to secure its best interests. They relate well to the overall aims of the Woodard Foundation as well as to the distinct priorities of the school. Since the last inspection, many areas of school life have been improved, whilst maintaining the school's core ethos.
- 4.2 Governors bring a wide range of experience and expertise to their work, including expertise in education. Their meetings benefit from the presence of a representative of the common room as well as of the headmaster and director of finance. Meetings of the finance and general purposes committee (F&GP) are attended by senior managers as well as by governors, with the result that school senior staff are fully involved in key financial decisions. Governors also have the opportunity to meet heads of department before their meetings and thus are kept in touch with important day-to-day issues. They understand their role as critical friend to all aspects of school life, as well as that of business managers.
- 4.3 Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities, for example in areas of welfare. They receive regular reports on health and safety, and one of their members oversees child protection arrangements and attends both meetings and training in school. Governors appreciate the need to hold the school to account but not to get too involved in its day-to-day running. They therefore provide effective oversight and share the key vision of providing an inclusive education, that is broad and which focuses much on the needs of the individual.
- 4.4 Governors bring particular oversight to the school's finances. They move promptly when key issues arise, for example responding to the opportunity to purchase adjacent land and secure future opportunities for the school. They have good links with the Woodard Corporation.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The school has in almost all respects a clear educational direction, which reflects strong leadership and a commitment to providing an education which is inclusive, wide ranging and supportive of pupils' needs. Since the last inspection, the school has improved the monitoring of its policies and extended access to the library, where recent re-organisation is providing a greater emphasis on non-fiction and other facilities for research.
- 4.6 Strong working relationships, both between senior managers in school and between senior managers and governors through the F&GP, mean that the school has a shared sense of purpose and that key decisions, for example about budgets and resources, are corporate rather than individual decisions. Whilst the school is strongly led by the headmaster, leadership is widely shared and the common sense of purpose is evident at all levels. The recent introduction of the IB has added a valuable dimension, though this dimension has not yet been fully exploited. Similarly, after a period of change, the place of the chapel at the heart of the school has not been fully realised in the minds of the pupils though it already plays an important role, both in times of difficulty and at times of celebration.
- 4.7 Development planning is strong, both at school and departmental level. The school's priorities focus on issues relating to teaching and learning as well as on issues of structure and resource. Clear priorities in development planning are generally supported by criteria for success and accountability. Heads of department provide a clear vision of how their subject

- may be improve, and communication within departments is good, both through regular meetings and informally. Where necessary, senior managers and heads of department have worked together to create a sharper focus for areas of development, both in terms of provision and outcomes. Liaison between Senior School heads of department and Lower School co-ordinators works well. Regular reviews of performance identify areas needing attention and are supported by both appraisal and professional development. All involved in leadership, both academic and pastoral, have a clear focus on the needs of the individual and on the importance of continuous improvement. Staff work well together to achieve these aims.
- 4.8 Both heads of department and senior managers play an important and effective role in monitoring standards, with some monitoring of day-to-day teaching and learning as well. For the most part, policies and procedures are carefully implemented though some areas of inconsistency such as marking remain. The school is already aware of many issues identified by the inspection.
- 4.9 The school is well staffed. Both teaching staff and the wide range of other staff share the school's common values, bring considerable commitment to all aspects of their work and place the needs of the pupils at the centre of all that they do. As a result, the school is a strong and purposeful community, and pupils value all that is done for them.
- 4.10 The school offers many opportunities for continuous professional development through in-service training days, courses and appraisal. The academic deputy head appraises all department heads every eighteen months. Staff are appraised by their head of department on a similar timescale. The appraisal system is successful in identifying where staff need further professional development. All new staff, both newly qualified and experienced, follow a first year induction programme, which they much appreciate. Clear guidance is given through subject mentors and induction tutors allowing those newly qualified to enjoy support from other staff and to feel part of a team. A programme of in-service training, network meetings and courses further their professional development. The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and provides appropriately for them. New staff are carefully checked for their suitability.
- 4.11 School finances are well managed with the necessary flexibility to respond to unexpected situations. The division of responsibility for non-teaching aspects of the school between a director of finance and director of operations works well and provides the school with the expertise it needs. Practical issues receive appropriate attention; for example, the quality of food has recently been improved. The school is well resourced and enjoys the use of impressive grounds and good premises; these are updated and extended as required. The school is well organised and all aspects of school life benefit from dedicated administrative, catering, medical, maintenance and grounds staff, to whom pupils relate well and who are firmly part of the school community.
- 4.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.13 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 Ellesmere College provides a strong sense of community underpinned by Christian values and a deep concern for the individual, richly fulfilling its own aims and those of the Woodard Foundation. Within the vibrant and well-integrated boarding and day community, pupils of all ages are quick to care for and support each other, and also take a wide range of responsibilities seriously. Outstanding standards of pastoral care, seen in careful monitoring but also expressed through individual support and care from both teaching and non-teaching staff, are much appreciated by pupils. The school takes innovative steps to involve parents in their children's education, and these links, together with those with the local community, are outstanding. A broad curriculum is enhanced by outstanding extra-curricular opportunities, in many of which pupils achieve exceptional standards, and by an innovative programme for younger pupils. Pupils achieve well as a result of both the individual attention and support they receive and the good standard of teaching in classes, the best of which provides challenge, interest and opportunity for pupils to develop their own learning. A minority of weaker teaching, less well matched to pupils' abilities, provides insufficient opportunity for independent work, or limited feedback. The school provides well for pupils with LDD and EAL. Decisive but supportive leadership, within both school and governing body, shares a common vision and sense of purpose, and a commitment to an inclusive approach to entry. By the time they leave, pupils are mature, fulfilled individuals who are comfortable with themselves and relate well to others; they are well-prepared for adult life.
- 5.2 Since the last inspection, provision for pupils with LDD or EAL has been improved; the school is now drawing more on all that its overseas pupils offer, but knows it has not yet integrated them fully; the school makes better use of assessment, and is aware that further development is required; the quality of pastoral care has been enhanced by the appointment of a head of Middle School and an educational visits coordinator; links with parents and the community have been further developed; a number of significant improvements to boarding accommodation have been made and all the recommendations of the 2007 Commission for Social Care Inspection have been acted on. The school has made a significant investment in adjacent land. Aspects of governance and of leadership and management have been improved whilst maintaining the school's core ethos.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no significant weaknesses. In order to develop further the good quality of education it already provides it should take the following steps.
1. Make further use of the monitoring of classroom practice to improve the consistency with which:
 - teaching is planned to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities, especially the most able;
 - teaching provides sufficient opportunity and challenge for independent work;
 - marking provides helpful guidance on how pupils can improve their work.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 17th to 20th November 2008. 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 two Ofsted inspectors over three days.

List of Inspectors

Mr Ian Newton	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Susan Allen	Former Head, ISA school
Mr Andrew Cowell	Head, IAPS school
Mr Thomas Garnier	Head, HMC school
Mrs Fiona Hallworth	Deputy Head, HMC school
Mr Christopher Hawkes	Head of Department, HMC/SHMIS school
Mr Rick James	Head of Department, HMC school
Dr Stephanie Thomas	Head of Department, HMC school
Mr Granville Sykes	Director of Studies, HMC school