

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Merchant Taylors' School for Girls

Full Name of the School	Merchant Taylors' School for Girls
DfES Number	343/6130
Registered Charity Number	526681
Address	Liverpool Road, Crosby, Liverpool L23 5SP.
Telephone Number	0151 924 3140
Fax Number	0151 932 1461
Email Address	office@mtgs.co.uk
Headmistress	Mrs L A Robinson
Chairman of Governors	Mr L C Coligan
Age Range	4-18
Gender	Girls 4-18; boys 4-7
Inspection Dates	5th to 8th 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 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.

1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

1.1 Merchant Taylors' School for Girls aims to

- educate the pupils in the fullest sense so that they begin to realise their academic and personal potential;
- create a happy and caring environment within which pupils can develop a sense of their personal worth;

- develop a clear understanding of what is right and wrong and a respect for others to enable each pupil to make a worthwhile contribution to the community;
 - develop initiative, confidence, independence and self-discipline in order to meet the challenges of life.
- 1.2 The Merchant Taylors' schools were established as a charity in 1620. The boys' school opened in 1622 and the girls' school in 1888. The girls' school educates girls between the ages of 4 and 18 and boys between the ages of 4 and 7. The schools are located close to each other along the coastal road in Crosby, and the junior school is about 500 yards from the senior school, also known as the main school.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection there were 572 pupils in the senior school and 322 in the junior school (Stanfield), of whom 75 were boys. These numbers have increased by about 10 per cent since the last inspection in the senior school and 30 per cent in the junior school. Since the last inspection there have been two changes of headmistress in the senior school, in 2004 and 2006. A new junior block was built in 2004.
- 1.4 Pupils entering the junior school are overall of above average ability, and if they were performing in line with their abilities, they would be reaching standards above the average for maintained primary schools. The ability of pupils entering the selective senior school is well above average. Therefore, if the pupils were performing in line with their abilities their results in public examinations would be well above the average for pupils in all maintained schools. The school's catchment area is wide, from south Liverpool as far north as Southport and east almost to Wigan and St Helen's. It covers a wide range of socio-economic groups and 92 senior school pupils receive financial help from the school. Pupils from ethnic minorities comprise about 5 per cent of the whole school.
- 1.5 Five pupils in the junior school and 23 in the senior school have English as an additional language. Two junior pupils receive support but the others have good linguistic skills in English. Twelve junior pupils and 29 senior pupils have been identified by the school as having mild learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) and they receive additional help from the school.
- 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 educational experience throughout the school is of high quality, much appreciated by the parents, who in their questionnaires wrote comments such as "I am pleased with the progress my daughter has made, the family atmosphere and the ethos that is fostered". The school's education fulfils its aims and aspirations for its pupils. In the last inspection report, quality of musical performance and pupils' academic successes were both identified as particular strengths and this remains true. In Reception, the curriculum is based around the six areas of learning and the children successfully attain the Early Learning Goals. From Years 1-6, and in the senior school, the education provided contributes to the linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development of the pupils, and enables them to acquire skills of speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. The transition for boys to the preparatory department of the Merchant Taylors' School, and that for girls from the junior to senior school, are well managed,

and preparation for careers and university entrance is very thorough. The extra-curricular programme throughout the school provides many varied opportunities to extend the pupils' education, and again, is greatly appreciated by pupils and parents.

Junior School

- 2.2 Stanfield knows that it is successful in fulfilling its aim to develop a friendly community based on mutual respect and consideration, creating a very happy, caring environment in which children can discover their talents and become effective learners. It prepares them thoroughly for the next stage of their education.
- 2.3 Since the last inspection, the building of an information and communication technology (ICT) suite in 2002 has enabled the introduction of a sound programme of ICT teaching throughout the school. The school is aware of the need for further development and has plans to extend the use of ICT in the next academic year.
- 2.4 .In addition to the subjects usually taught in primary schools, the school introduces French in Year 4. Pupils in Year 6 can begin to learn either German or Spanish. These are taught by staff from the senior school, as are some classes in physical education (PE). Design and technology (DT) and art are taught to an excellent standard throughout the school, and exhibited in many colourful and varied displays. Citizenship is positively reinforced not only in dedicated personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons but also by being interwoven into the daily life of the school, enhancing the environment and making it a safe and happy place in which to learn.
- 2.5 The timetable is constructed to allow sufficient teaching time in all subjects. The curriculum is enhanced at all stages by a variety of educational visits, including a residential trip in Year 6 to an activity centre. Visitors to the school enrich the learning experience as was seen during the inspection with a Viking day for pupils in Year 3.
- 2.6 The provision of extra-curricular activities is excellent, with a wide variety of activities for children in all age groups offered both at lunchtime and after school. Clubs cater for a wide range of interests including music, ICT and sport. A very successful football club in Year 2 is enhanced by the use of coaches from a local soccer academy. Other clubs provide academic enrichment in mathematics and modern foreign languages.
- 2.7 Induction into Reception is effective. In the term before they start, both pupils and parents are invited to spend time in school. Boys leaving at Year 2 are visited by staff from the boys' junior school before a half-day visit to ensure a smooth transition with which parents are happy. Similar arrangements are in place for girls in Year 6.
- 2.8 Curriculum planning and policy documents are highly detailed and provide continuity and continued development in learning across the school. Links between different subjects are well defined. Subject co-ordinators regularly review the curriculum to ensure that all pupils are catered for and benefit from the extensive range of activities provided. Provision for pupils with LDD is outstanding. Children are withdrawn either in small groups or individually. Highly detailed individual learning plans have been produced for these pupils, and for those with EAL, ensuring that they receive an education suited to their needs.

Senior School

- 2.9 The senior school knows that much of the educational provision is very successful in fulfilling the school's aims, and is also aware of the areas identified by the inspection

as in need of improvement – the encouragement of independent learning and missed opportunities to make full use of ICT to enhance the pupils' education. The curricular options provided for the pupils are enhanced by increasing co-operation with the boys' school at sixth-form level, which not only enables minority subjects such as economics, German, music and PE to be offered, but also allows for more flexibility in the pupils' choices of subjects.

- 2.10 Separate sciences are taught throughout the school, modern language provision is extensive and all pupils have two years of classics, including Latin. Religious studies (RS) and PSHE are provided throughout the senior school. Curriculum planning has been strengthened by the recent formation of a curriculum committee which has considered, for example, the new GCSE science and the effectiveness of learning in Year 10. The sixth form offers 23 A level subjects including a choice of two English courses, and either early or late modern history.
- 2.11 The extra-curricular provision is not only wide ranging and of a very high standard, but a high proportion of pupils take part in one or more activities, and excellent records are kept of their participation and achievements. These records are also used to identify those less involved and to encourage them to find an activity to enjoy. Links with the boys' school enable mixed extra-curricular activities, especially the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), throughout the senior school. Given the wide catchment area of the school, and the bus system used by many pupils, this high participation rate is excellent.
- 2.12 Work experience is organised by the school and takes place in the pupils' own time in Years 11 and 12. The pupils speak highly of the value of this, and of the careers education and advice they receive. The sixth form do voluntary work in primary schools and other local organisations, and other pupils perform community service under the aegis of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Preparation for university entrance is thorough and excellent records are kept by form tutors and sixth formers of the progress of their applications.
- 2.13 Pupils with LDD are identified, and individual action plans developed, so that pupils who need specific help receive it. The pupils with EAL are all fluent speakers and writers of English and do not need specialist provision. Some extension activities are available for the most able, and some opportunities for independent learning are seized, but not enough is yet done to provide significant challenge for the most able. The school knows this, and has recently identified its gifted and talented pupils, using the national criteria and input from departments, and is developing a programme for them to ensure that all pupils, whatever their needs, have equal opportunity to fulfil them.

Whole School

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

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.15 Pupils' learning and achievements are good throughout the school. The pupils' 'success in terms of academic achievements' was identified as a major strength of the school at the last inspection, and this remains the case. Pupils realise their academic potential and the vast majority achieve more than would be expected from their ability on entry. They also achieve well in extra-curricular activities. Much of this success can be attributed to the conspicuous pleasure the pupils take in their learning inside and outside the classroom.

Junior School

- 2.16 Pupils in the junior school are above average ability overall, and they achieve high standards. They do not take national tests at the age of 7 or 11, but most of them succeed in gaining entry to the selective schools in the Merchant Taylors' group, either at the age of seven, for boys, or eleven for girls. Evidence from written work and lessons observed shows that work throughout the school is of a high standard, both in content and presentation, and the displays created by pupils around the school are justifiably a cause of much pride amongst the whole school community.
- 2.17 Pupils learn to read fluently and many talk intelligently about the fiction and non-fiction books that they read. They listen attentively to their teachers and each other. Most of the pupils are highly articulate, and when given the opportunity can argue and reason for themselves. Younger pupils form secure foundations in writing and make good progress in this. The few children with LDD are well supported. However, writing in some subjects is over-dependent on standardised worksheets.
- 2.18 Pupils in all parts of the school acquire a good grasp of number and problem solving skills. Pupils are beginning to study and learn for themselves, and when tasks are set which call for independent study they can do this well. They settle to their work, co-operating in pairs and groups, and support and help each other well. Almost all show a marked enjoyment in their work, persevering through difficulties and taking pride in overcoming them. They go through the school day with evident enthusiasm and were almost unanimous in expressing the highest level of enjoyment in their questionnaires. The happy and purposeful atmosphere within the school both supports and accounts for their progress.
- 2.19 Pupils achieve well in sporting activities and music. The school's high reputation in local and regional musical events and festivals is underpinned by successful individual instrumental tuition. Pupils enjoy considerable success in music examinations, and have been placed first and second at the Crosby Festival of music and dance. Similarly pupils compete successfully in local competitions in swimming and other sports, including tennis.

Senior School

- 2.20 Nationally standardised measurements indicate that, with a few exceptions, progress to GCSE over recent years has been above the norm though the picture is less consistent at A-level. At GCSE pupils achieve far above the national average, and at A level results are above the average for selective maintained schools.
- 2.21 Pupils of all abilities are well grounded in knowledge, skill and understanding in the subjects and activities provided. They are well motivated and respond positively to opportunities and challenges provided by the school and are able to think and act critically and creatively when encouraged to do so. Pupils settle well to their studies in class. They are articulate, able to listen to others' points of view, argue logically and express opinions with conviction and confidence. They apply mathematics and mathematical concepts effectively. Pupils can make effective use of ICT when given the chance to do so, but this is too often confined to basic research and presentation skills. Pupils are well organised and take their own notes in class without fuss. Evidence of study skills was observed where spider diagrams or bullet points were used. In class, pupils work effectively individually, in pairs and in groups and are supportive of each other. Pupils clearly enjoy their studies and benefit from group activities which foster the opportunity to think, reason, debate and interact constructively.

- 2.22 Success is not confined to academic subjects. Pupils achieve highly in many activities – as individuals, groups and teams competing in local, county and national competitions ranging from athletics, rowing and hockey to science Olympiads and the BBC Shakespeare Film Competition. The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme and CCF thrive and contribute substantially towards team spirit, leadership, confidence and independence. Pupils respond positively to the education experience provided and speak enthusiastically of the opportunities offered through the school. They settle well to extra-curricular activities, and persevere with them; for instance, the astronomy club is an after school activity leading to GCSE astronomy, and this requires application and determination as well as providing enjoyment. The pupils and their parents particularly value and appreciate the expertise and commitment of the staff, and speak highly of the teachers’ contribution to the girls’ achievements.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.23 Pupils’ personal development is outstanding and fulfils extremely well the school’s aims and aspirations. At the last inspection the school was said to provide a very worthwhile range of activities for such development; the school has continued to make progress with these and the school’s provision for the pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development enables them to develop a strong strength of personal worth. The pupils are confident, secure, and demonstrate very good – but not at all overbearing – self esteem. They show a clear understanding of right and wrong, both in the ordinary routine of school, where respect for rules and each other is very marked, and in the wider world, as evidenced by their concern for the environment. Pupils show strong self-discipline in the way they settle to all their activities, and develop initiative at all stages of their school life by being given carefully graded opportunities to do so. The school ethos of support, encouragement and celebration of achievement is a strong contributing factor in the pupils’ personal development.

Junior School

- 2.24 The excellence of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development shines through in the high quality of school assemblies, the displays throughout the school, and in observation of, and conversation with, pupils and staff. Pupils have a strong respect for the law and an appropriate knowledge of public institutions and services. Assemblies may be religious in focus, or celebrate different cultural traditions, for example the Chinese New Year; these encourage pupils to reflect on their own personal beliefs, while at the same time developing their tolerance and respect for other cultures, which is an outstanding feature of the school. All the examples seen were conducive to developing pupils’ appreciation of their own and others’ development.
- 2.25 The school council allows pupils not only a chance to air grievances – of which there are very few – but to influence changes in the daily routine or the provision of resources. For example, pupils are able to suggest which charities they would like to raise funds for, or how to develop playground areas to improve playtime. Social development is encouraged by a buddy system, the ‘friendship bench’ and the way in which older pupils freely offer their help in caring for younger ones. The large number of former Stanfield pupils who return as sixth formers to help on Tuesday afternoons also demonstrates this. The lunch system works well, with even the youngest children eating tidily and behaving responsibly. Pupils behave well and show awareness of right and wrong.
- 2.26 Pupils and their parents are proud of their school; when some Year 5 and 6 girls were asked what changes they would make, they expressed themselves entirely satisfied with the status quo. Vigorous applause greeted the news that two girls had been

chosen for the cathedral choir, and that all Year 6 girls had passed their entrance examination to the senior school.

Senior School

- 2.27 Pupils develop very well spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. The policy for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is well grounded through the involvement of all staff through their departments, and pupils take the many opportunities offered by a wide range of opportunities and experiences in school to explore their faiths, values and beliefs. Their knowledge and understanding, and their ability to make responsible and reasoned judgements, are well developed through all subjects in the curriculum.
- 2.28 Pupils show great self-confidence when expressing their views and beliefs in front of others. Outstanding spiritual development is fostered in assemblies, through the curriculum, especially in religious studies (RS) and PSHE, and in the high quality of extra-curricular provision such as the performing arts of music and drama.
- 2.29 The ethos of the school encourages the development of a strong moral code. Pupils display an excellent understanding of right and wrong and have a respect for rules and a standard of good behaviour. They exhibit respect, honesty, self-discipline and consideration for others, and can articulate their values fluently and recognise the moral dimensions in many situations. Behaviour in the narrow pavements outside school while pupils wait for buses shows a high degree of self-discipline, respect for others, and excellent manners; pupils make way for other pedestrians without needing to be asked.
- 2.30 Pupils show very good social development and excellent behaviour around the school and in the classroom. The quality of relationships between the pupils, and between staff and pupils, is outstanding, and promotes a friendly, caring and supportive community. A wide range of extra-curricular activity promotes sociability, and aspects of citizenship are taught in many subjects. Pupils understand how they can contribute to community life, and, for instance, are much involved in recycling within school. The school council is chaired by the head girl, and many sixth formers are members of committees which arrange activities for the whole school. Through involvement with The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme award scheme, and the CCF, pupils contribute to civic life, and are aware of public institutions and services.
- 2.31 The school fosters a sense of respect for all regardless of race or culture. Pupils are sensitive to pupils of all faiths and celebrate difference and common traditions. Pupils are proud of their Merseyside heritage and their own culture, while taking advantage of opportunities to share in other cultural traditions in school and in the wider community. An assembly on Chinese New Year showed that the pupils are tolerant, interested in other traditions, and proud of the fact that Liverpool has one of the oldest Chinese communities in the country. It was also an example of great self-confidence on the part of the pupils presenting it.

Whole School

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

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.33 The quality of teaching is good throughout the school and fulfils the school's aims of educating pupils to reach their academic potential. In the lessons observed, some was outstanding and it was never less than satisfactory. This is broadly in line with the

finding of the last inspection report that ‘a well qualified and dedicated staff whose teaching is generally good’ was a ‘strength of the school’. Pupils and parents alike strongly agree that the teaching at the school helps the girls to make progress. The teaching fosters in pupils the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort and interest in their work; whenever the opportunity is presented pupils show the ability to think and learn for themselves. The school is aware of the strength of its teaching by well-qualified specialist staff but at the same time recognises that the criticism in the last inspection report of the provision for the most able still needs attention. The other area the school is developing is the use of ICT to enhance teaching and thus raise standards further. Since the last inspection, when teaching in geography and modern foreign languages was specifically criticised, teaching in these departments has greatly improved and is now good. Throughout the school, despite examples of good practice in many subjects, pupils were not always sufficiently encouraged to use their own initiative and some opportunities for them to work independently and take real responsibility for their own progress were missed.

Junior School

- 2.34 The quality of teaching in the junior school is often good or better, and frequently outstanding. Throughout this section of the school teaching successfully enables pupils to acquire new knowledge, develop their skills and make good progress, including those with LDD and EAL. The teaching includes a diverse and varied programme of trips and visits and encourages the highest standards of conduct from pupils who respond very well to their teachers.
- 2.35 The relationships between teachers and pupils are extremely positive and based upon a high degree of mutual trust. The pupils’ behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Teachers know their pupils well both academically and personally and use positive reinforcement to ensure very good behaviour and effort. Teachers are aware of those pupils who have been identified as requiring support, and additional ‘workshops’ in lunch-times help to cater for different needs and are much appreciated by the pupils.
- 2.36 Teaching is well planned and often interesting. In the best lessons learning objectives are central to the good quality of the learning and are shared openly with pupils. However, in some lessons a lack of variety in approach and an over-dependency on worksheet tasks led to rather passive learning and pupils not always being sufficiently encouraged to think for themselves.
- 2.37 Throughout the junior school a sound understanding of the pupils’ needs influences the teaching. The use of grouping by ability in Years 1 and 2 enables teaching to be well matched to the abilities of pupils in each group. The pupils understand this system and appreciate the purpose of grouping. In Years 3 to 6, the encouragement and enthusiasm in much of the teaching effectively foster in pupils the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort.
- 2.38 The well-qualified teachers are highly motivated and hard working and have an excellent knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They are particularly conscious of the demands of external examinations and use these as a specific focus, to provide well-targeted activities. The recent introduction of interactive whiteboards into many classrooms provides a potential medium through which to diversify styles of teaching and share good practice. Insufficient staff training means that this new resource is not as fully utilised as it might be.
- 2.39 The resources to support teaching and learning are excellent and eye-catching displays in classrooms and corridors significantly add stimulus to the learning

opportunities. Resources are abundant, and include an ICT suite, assorted interactive whiteboards and a bank of laptops for Year 6 pupils. The junior site also includes indoor and outdoor play equipment, a multi-functional school hall, and library resources that are dispersed around the school. All of these resources are well used but the school hall does not aid the effective teaching of PE to the older pupils. ICT provision is very good. The pupils' skills are good and they know what ICT can be used for.

- 2.40 The junior school continues to have a very good marking and assessment policy that is generally adhered to. Marking of work is regular, predominantly encouraging in tone, with outcomes that are well understood and appreciated by the pupils. Whilst homework is regularly set, it is principally used to develop work introduced in lessons or as a medium through which to catch up on work that has been missed, rather than to extend the opportunity for independent learning.
- 2.41 Nevertheless teachers have and share with each other a good understanding of how their pupils are progressing across various subjects, a knowledge that is clearly reflected in the detailed and helpful reports that are sent to parents. These reports evaluate pupils' performances against the school's aims of enabling all to reach their academic potential, and take into account prior progress and achievement. All staff possess details of individual pupils' difficulties and needs.

Senior school

- 2.42 The teaching was good or outstanding in a significant proportion of the lessons observed. It enables pupils of all abilities, including those with LDD, to acquire new knowledge, make progress, increase their understanding and develop their skills. Progress is particularly evident with middle and lower ability pupils but teaching is not always designed to stretch the most able or allow them to develop a deep understanding of the most challenging ideas and concepts. Commendable examples of activities constructed to get the best out of these able pupils were seen in classics, English and music.
- 2.43 Teaching is well planned for achievement but not necessarily for independent learning. For instance, an effective range of learning activities is used in classics, geography and modern languages, but in science and mathematics too many lessons have closely structured tasks with little or no opportunity for extension work. In mathematics, lessons are often too tightly controlled to allow reasoning to develop at the same speed as knowledge and technique. Some science lessons, consisting of formal note taking from the board or the completion of inflexible worksheets, give no scope for pupils of different abilities to progress at the most appropriate speed.
- 2.44 Teachers know their pupils well and the teaching is designed to ensure that they achieve their best. Scores in nationally standardised tests are known by the staff and used to inform setting and assessment, and to track pupils' progress. Target setting has been introduced in the sixth form and its extension to other years is planned.
- 2.45 Teaching demonstrates excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught, and in the best lessons specialised vocabulary is well used. In modern foreign languages the target language is used appropriately to enhance learning. In many subjects teachers demonstrated knowledge and understanding in associated areas and this greatly benefited the pupils' general knowledge and awareness of the interconnectedness of subjects.
- 2.46 Teaching is supported by an adequate quality, quantity and range of resources which in the main are well used. Some use is made of the ICT facilities outside specialist

lessons. ICT is used effectively to stimulate and extend learning with interactive software programs and classroom access to the internet in several departments, for instance art, geography, history, home economics, modern languages and physics. At other times, the interactive whiteboards are used simply as projector screens by the teacher.

- 2.47 The assessment of pupils' work in Year 10 to 13 is firmly focused on public examination mark schemes and helpful feedback is provided to the pupils and also used in lesson planning. The pupils know and understand that different departments have different marking schemes. Marking is regular and frequently encouraging, but the provision of comments to assist in the development of pupils' learning is patchy.
- 2.48 Teaching encourages responsible behaviour in all lessons, and where particular codes of behaviour are necessary, in practical and creative subjects, the pupils are well trained and respond well to tasks set in a sometimes limited space.
- 2.49 The school evaluates pupils' performance by reference to entrance examination results and the use of nationally standardised tests and public examination results.

Whole School

- 2.50 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 Throughout the school the quality of pastoral care is outstanding; it remains, as it was six years ago at the last inspection, a strength of the school, fulfilling its aims to 'create a happy and caring environment'. The school rightly prides itself on this aspect of its work, and parents and pupils alike are full of praise for it. The excellent pastoral care of the pupils is a major contribution not simply to the happy, stable and productive atmosphere of the school but also to the high standards achieved in academic and other activities.

Junior School

- 3.2 The pupils love being at Stanfield. This is clear from their behaviour, attitude and relationships, and what they wrote in their questionnaires and said in interviews. They would not hesitate to ask a teacher for help; they feel that teachers are fair with rewards, that the school rules are just and that the school deals effectively with any issues that arise.
- 3.3 Arrangements for pastoral care are excellent. Staff have clear guidelines, supervision is very good, for instance in the dining hall, the child protection officer is fully up to date with the required training, and it is clear that the pupils' welfare is the school's top priority.
- 3.4 Exemplary behaviour is the norm, encouraged by praise for acts of kindness and consideration and the assumption that all pupils will behave unselfishly. The school has an excellent anti-bullying policy and no evidence of any bullying was seen. In the narrow corridors, older pupils help to ensure the safety of the little ones. The quality of relationships in the school is so good because the whole school community knows the children well.

- 3.5 Proper care is taken to ensure the health and safety of pupils both in school and on school trips. The minor recommendations in the last report to improve the playground in the junior school have been acted on. The new handbook on trips and outings includes exemplary risk assessments. Fire precautions are excellent. The school nurse, who is based at the boys' school for most of the week, is available for advice, or in an emergency, and all staff are trained in basic first aid.
- 3.6 The quality of school meals is excellent. The meals themselves are appetising and well prepared with a choice of healthy meals for staff and pupils. All necessary measures to reduce risk from fire or other hazards are in place.

Senior School

- 3.7 The structure and arrangements for pastoral care are excellent but what is distinctive is that all the staff, at every level, are involved in providing support and guidance to the pupils. During interviews, and in their responses to the pupil questionnaire, all pupils said they felt well supported and that there was someone they would turn to for help or advice. Progress meetings are held regularly to discuss individual pupils experiencing problems. Appropriate and varied strategies are implemented and monitored. A staff mentoring programme supports pupils in Years 10 to 13 who are under achieving academically.
- 3.8 The strength of the pastoral system lies in the investment of people at important stages – three heads of school, a head of Year 7, a pastoral counsellor and her assistant, and the pastoral deputy head make a very strong team. All roles are clearly defined, and an effective system of sharing information means that it would be hard for any pupil to slip through the net. The school also has exemplary mechanisms for the induction of new pupils.
- 3.9 The quality of relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils is excellent. Mutual respect is demonstrated at every level. In registration, relationships are relaxed but purposeful, and valuable use is made of this contact time at all levels. For instance, Year 13 tutors spent time updating information on university offers and interviews.
- 3.10 Measures to promote good discipline and behaviour, including procedures to guard against harassment and bullying are effective and deal constructively with unacceptable behaviour. All the required policies are in place. Good behaviour is promoted and acknowledged through a system of rewards based on merit marks. Inappropriate behaviour is dealt with firmly but sensitively through order marks. Pupils who give cause for more concern are discussed at regular tutor meetings and may be placed on report.
- 3.11 Child protection measures are in place with three designated people who receive twice-yearly training. All other staff receive training every three years and a governor is designated to deal with child protection issues.
- 3.12 All necessary measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken. All necessary fire prevention procedures are in place. A fire safety audit was carried out in October 2006 and the fire policy is being revised.
- 3.13 Arrangements to ensure health and safety are effective and the school has due regard for the health and safety regulations. In the last inspection report it was stated that 'protective clothing is not used consistently in practical science lessons' and this is still the case. The health and safety committee includes members from all the appropriate areas of school and has a nominated governor. Staff can raise any health

and safety concerns at the weekly staff meeting or at any other time. Fire practice records are up to date.

- 3.14 School food is well prepared, and provides the chance to eat healthily, though the chance is not always taken. Several pupils were seen to eat a meal of pizza, chips, spaghetti hoops and cake. On the other hand, the range and variety of salads on offer are excellent.

Whole School

- 3.15 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

- 3.16 Links with parents and the community are excellent. At the last inspection they were judged to be good, with weaknesses in reporting criticised. Reports are much improved. Parental questionnaires reflected overwhelming satisfaction with the education and support provided, and members of the Parents' Association (PA) committee were full of praise for the school and felt that their daughters had enjoyed and benefited from their education. They also pointed out that many parents make great financial sacrifices so that their children can attend the school, and clearly find these sacrifices worthwhile.

Junior School

- 3.17 Links with parents and the community are outstanding. The school prides itself on fostering and maintaining a positive working relationship with parents, and in developing purposeful links with both local and global communities.
- 3.18 From the time they join the school, parents are made to feel welcome. In the term before they start, they attend an induction day with their children. It gives the opportunity for parents to meet socially and for both them and children to be welcomed into the Stanfield family.
- 3.19 Parents are given many worthwhile opportunities to become involved with the work and progress of their children. They are welcomed into school for matches, concerts, and drama productions. Parents with particular skills or interests are invited to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with the children as was seen in the Year 2 German Club.
- 3.20 Information about the school and their children's work and progress is shared with parents very well. In reception, ongoing and frequent contact with parents ensures that they are informed about and involved in their child's progress.
- 3.21 Each term parents receive a 'curriculum newsletter' which outlines what is to be taught. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are also set termly individual targets. After that, 'orders' indicating levels of effort and attainment are sent out twice each term. Parents' evenings are held twice a year and a written briefing note for parents of all matters discussed is issued at these meetings; parents sign them at the end of the meeting. All parents receive detailed, informative reports in all subjects at the end of each academic year. Successes and highlights within the school are featured in a termly news letter issued in conjunction with the senior school. Due care is given to parental concerns. All parents are made aware of the complaints procedure and the few complaints made have been resolved informally.

- 3.22 The school has strong links with both the local and worldwide community. Its close links with the rest of the Merchant Taylors' 'family' are important to the school. The choir and bell ringers both perform in the local community and many fund-raising events provide valuable aid both locally and further afield. The school has recently embarked on an ambitious long-term project which links Waterloo in Liverpool to its namesake in Sierra Leone.

Senior school

- 3.23 The great majority of parents believed they had good opportunities to be involved in activities at school and in the work and progress of their children. The one in five dissatisfaction rating on this part of the survey may partly have arisen because of some sense of dislocation between the PA and the school. At present the PA raises funds for the school, updates prize boards, finances endeavour prizes, provides refreshments at open days and organises some social events. The new PA leadership is aware of the value of 'encouraging integration of parents and school for the benefit of the children', and it hopes to reinvigorate the partnership with the school. Staff representation at meetings is regular and much appreciated.

- 3.24 Parents receive detailed information about school events and successes through the newsletter. Regular information about pupils' progress is provided by clear reports issued twice a year and regular parents' evenings. Reports contain comments about the pupils' skills and progress, and also details of courses and syllabuses, rectifying an omission remarked on in the last inspection report. Although about one in ten parents state they are not satisfied with the information provided on reports, only one formal complaint has been made in the past year. Nevertheless a committee has been set up to consider reporting.

- 3.25 The school handles the concerns of parents with due care, as most parents agree. A clear, compliant complaints procedure is communicated to all parents and complaints are answered within the given time scales; all complaints received in the last two years have been resolved, all of them informally.

- 3.26 The school's links with the wider community are extremely positive. The school aims of 'enabling each pupil to make a worthwhile contribution to the community' and 'developing initiative, confidence, independence and self-discipline in order to meet the challenges of life' are fully met through an extensive range of activities within the community. These cover community service, the eco-garden, work experience and many others. In addition, the governing body is deeply rooted in the school and the community, and the growing co-operation with the boys' school strengthens these community links.

Whole School

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

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The quality of governance is good, as reflected in the success with which the school fulfils its aims and aspirations. At the last inspection, the arrangements for governing the combined Merchant Taylors' schools were judged to be effective. In late 2006 the

structure of the governing body was changed to increase its effectiveness by having fewer governors and fewer committees, which, it is planned, will meet more regularly. Some of the tasks carried out by committee, such as decisions on financial help to parents who meet unexpected difficulties, have now been devolved to the executive board, consisting of the four heads of junior and senior schools in the Merchant Taylors' group and the bursar. The governors receive the minutes of the fortnightly meetings of this group and thus are able to keep a close eye on what is happening. So the structure and management arrangements are well defined but as yet so new that no judgement can be made about whether they support effective oversight of the school.

- 4.2 Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities and are involved in setting educational priorities and financial planning, both of which are important elements of discussion at the annual strategy day. One governor has a particular link with the junior school. They have decided priorities for development and taken care to inform themselves by, for example, commissioning a space audit to help decide on building priorities. Constraints such as the difficulties of gaining planning permission make for slow progress in some areas, but the financial resources needed have been set aside.
- 4.3 Relations between governors and staff are good at a senior level but many of the staff still think the governors are too remote. Since the last inspection report a staff and governors liaison committee has been set up and it meets twice a year, though its remit and terms of reference are not generally known. Some governors are assigned as link governors to departments, which was a recommendation of the last inspection report. One governor has oversight of health and safety matters, and another takes particular responsibility for child protection matters. The governors certainly intend both to support and challenge the staff, and as with many aspects of governance and senior school management, the foundations have been laid for the school to make rapid progress.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

Junior School

- 4.4 Clear educational direction and excellent leadership have ensured very good education, excellent care of the pupils and the fulfilment of the school's aims. The expansion of the school while retaining and developing the strengths described in the previous inspection report is testament to the leadership of the senior team at Stanfield. The school recruits and retains high quality staff, and resources are very well managed to provide an attractive, well planned and well-resourced environment for the pupils. Policies and procedures which meet the school's aims and needs are laid down, regularly reviewed and monitored. Day-to-day administration is very efficient. The head of the junior school is part of the whole-school senior management team and is a member of the executive board, so most of the work on needs and priorities takes place jointly.

Senior School

- 4.5 Dynamic leadership since the appointment of a new senior management team has further strengthened the management of the school, which at the time of the last inspection was described as being 'sensitively and capably led'. Development planning has identified priorities and approaches for the school and the headmistress and her deputies have begun to put decisions into practice. The school is continuing to provide a high quality of education while planning for the future without losing the traditions and strengths of the past. The main management priority is to make sure

that middle management, in particular heads of department, have the time, training and resources to carry out the tasks assigned to them.

- 4.6 The headmistress, her deputies and the pastoral management team have drawn up and are beginning to implement appropriate procedures and policies. Checking their effectiveness, and ensuring that heads of department carry out the monitoring required of them, is more difficult. For instance, implementation of different types of monitoring teaching and learning is patchy, with some departments doing little and others, like English, carrying out a full programme. Staff development interviews have taken place for all staff since September but the lesson observation element of the appraisal system is temporarily on hold.
- 4.7 The school has recruited and retained motivated and hardworking staff who have enabled the school to continue to run successfully over the past few years. They are well qualified and know their subjects extremely well. Training for individuals and the whole staff is provided regularly and they are up to date with changes in education and such areas as child protection legislation.
- 4.8 Financial resources are well managed and day- to-day control of spending is carefully carried out. The centralisation of bursary, marketing and human resources functions effects savings in time and increases efficiency. The administration of the school is efficient and communication at all levels is good.

Whole School

- 4.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.10 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 meets its own aspirations to a very large extent; it also meets the first aim of the governors as expressed in their return to the Charity Commission, of ensuring that it remains 'one of the top academic schools in the North West'. Pupils in all sections of the school achieve very well academically and leave the school confident that they can face the challenges of the next stage of their education. A high proportion of pupils take part in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, often achieving success at local level, and occasionally nationally.
- 5.2 Pupils certainly 'begin to realise' their potential, even though some chances to do this for the most able are missed; the school achieves a 'happy and caring environment leading to a sense of personal worth'; its pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong, and demonstrate initiative, confidence and self-discipline.
- 5.3 The school has improved in many ways since the last inspection. The main recommendations have been met to some extent, and many of the minor recommendations have been carried out in full. Departmental development planning is more closely integrated with the whole school plan, and efforts have been made, and are continuing, to provide sufficient challenge for all pupils.
- 5.4 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.5 In order to maintain the impetus of newly implemented changes, and to take the school further forward, the school should consider:
1. allocating time and training to academic middle managers to enable them to monitor teaching and learning in order to raise standards further
 2. providing subject-specific training and information so that the potential of ICT to improve teaching and learning can be fully developed across the curriculum.
- 5.6 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 5th to 8th 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. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mrs Anne-Marie Sutcliffe	Reporting Inspector
Mr Christopher Richmond	Assistant Reporting Inspector. Former head of department, IAPS school
Mrs Barbara Bates	Former principal, GSA school
Mr Alfred Bogyor	Deputy head, junior department, HMC school
Mrs Maureen Bradley	Former head, ISA school
Mr Alastair Doyle	Head of department, HMC school
Mr Keith Hamflett	Senior manager, HMC school
Mrs Hilary Hutton	Deputy head, kindergarten, GSA school
Mrs Marie McHugh	Assistant head, GSA school
Mrs Janet Mitchell	Deputy head, GSA school
Mr Peter Rushforth	Head, IAPS school