

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

INSPECTION OF

SOLIHULL SCHOOL

By the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

On

January 24th - 28th 2005

SUMMARY REPORT

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

SUMMARY INSPECTION REPORT ON

Solihull School

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

Full Name of the School	Solihull School		
DfES Number	334/6003		
Address	Warwick Road, Solihull B91 3DJ		
Telephone Number	0121 705 0958		
Fax Number	0121 711 4439		
E-mail Address	<u>admin@solsch.org.uk</u>		
Name of Headmaster	Mr. John A. Cloughton, MA		
Chairman of Governors	Mr. Graham Hughes FCA		
Age Range	11-18	Gender	Mixed
Number of Pupils	819	Number of Boarders	Nil
Inspection Dates	24th – 28th January 2005		

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 163(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, 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.

MAIN FINDINGS

Overall Summary

Solihull School achieves with conspicuous success its aim of educating the whole person, offering an exceptional range of high quality activities, which enrich the broad, innovative curriculum and lead to excellence in standards of pupils' personal development. Intelligent, committed leadership, which is taking the school forward with a new vision, encompassing both pastoral care and concern for others and cultivation of the mind, is facilitating the creation of a civilised, inclusive environment, in which all pupils are helped to grow in self-confidence and self-esteem. High academic standards are being achieved at A level and record numbers of Year 13 pupils have gained offers of places this year at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Astute governance has endowed the school both with many outstanding facilities and with a large scholarship and bursaries fund, but communication and collaboration between governors and the school community are not always ideal. Exemplary foundations have been laid for this vibrant school to develop with confidence into an educational community of notable distinction in the years to come.

What the School Does Well

The school has many strengths; outstanding amongst these are the following:

- The exceptional range and quality of the highly valued activities programme, allied to a broad and challenging curriculum, provide pupils with unrivalled opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The pastoral care, support and guidance provided for the pupils are of high quality. Pupils' very good relationships with one another and with the staff are based on mutual respect and trust and produce a culture conducive to intellectual curiosity and to high standards of learning.
- High academic standards are achieved at A-level.
- The vision and inspirational leadership of the headmaster, with his personal commitment to the welfare of each individual pupil, ably supported by an efficient and well balanced senior management team, have created an immensely civilising environment, in which all pupils are encouraged to develop the full range of their talents and realise their potential.
- A talented, dedicated team of teaching and support staff nurture and support joy in learning, an appetite for knowledge and a determination to achieve in well-motivated, purposeful and eager pupils.
- The life of the school is supported by many outstanding facilities, as well as by a generous scholarship and bursary fund. This has been made possible by the commitment and astute financial acumen of the governing body, past and present.

What the School Should Do Better

The school has no significant weaknesses, but would benefit from improvement in the following areas:

- Sharing of best practice and mutual lesson observation are not sufficiently systematic both within and between departments.
- Despite the governors' undoubted commitment to the best interests of the school, lack of communication with the school community is causing the governors to be perceived

as remote by staff and management. Structures in place for the governance of the school do not reflect the best current procedures.

Standards of Attainment and Progress in Subjects

The quality of pupils' attainment and progress is good at all ages in the school and often high, particularly in Years 12-13. Pupils' attainment in public examinations is good in GCSE and high at A Level in relation to their abilities. Girls, who are currently only in the sixth form, performed consistently better than boys over the three years 2001-2003, but the boys reversed the trend in 2004. Pupils make rapid progress in Years 7-9 and particularly in Years 12-13, where results at A level have improved consistently over the last four years. Individual education plans (IEPs), monitored closely by the school, help pupils with special educational needs (SEN) to make good progress at all levels.

The Quality of Pupils' Learning, Attitudes and their Behaviour

The quality of learning, attitudes and behaviour of the pupils is very good. The openness of the pupils, their high levels of motivation and concentration, the supportive family atmosphere and the strong culture of celebration of achievement allow the school to realise its stated aim of promoting joy in learning. Pupils' very good relationships with one another and with the staff are based on mutual respect and trust and produce an atmosphere conducive to intellectual curiosity and to high standards of learning.

The Quality of Teaching

The quality of teaching is very good. The teaching contributes very effectively to pupils' attainment, learning and progress across the full age and ability ranges. Teachers have very good and often excellent subject knowledge and maintain very good levels of discipline, nearly always in a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere. Teachers set appropriate and challenging tasks to pupils of all abilities but departmental practice in promoting independent learning is uneven.

Other Aspects of the School

Attendance

Attendance levels at the school are good and this allows pupils to take advantage of the opportunities on offer. The level of unauthorised absence is low. Arrangements for registration are correctly observed and attendance and admissions registers are completed according to statutory requirements.

Assessment and Recording

Assessment and recording of pupils' work are good. Systems for assessing and recording pupil's attainment and progress are efficient, thorough and appropriate for the age and needs of the pupils. Pupils' work is marked regularly, but the school's comprehensive marking policy is not universally applied and not all marking lives up to the best standards observed, where constructive comments offer detailed help to pupils to improve their learning. The excellent new grading system for assessment of pupils' performance is helping teachers and parents to monitor pupils' progress more thoroughly in line with school policy, but assessment information is not always used as a contribution to curriculum development and planning.

Curriculum

The curriculum is very good throughout and embodies the school's aim in seeking to educate and develop the whole personality. It reflects the academic character of the school and appropriately meets the needs of all pupils regardless of their gender or ethnic origin, providing very good continuity and progression of learning. The needs of the high flyers are provided for, whilst those with SEN receive learning support, compliant with regulations in the case of statemented pupils, and teachers are kept informed of their needs. The breadth of education is supplemented by the generous provision for games, by enrichment courses in Year 12 and by the well-supported, highly valued and extensive range of extra-curricular activities.

Teaching and Non-teaching Staff

The provision and quality of teaching staff are very good. Levels of experience and qualifications are high and teachers work very hard. They are committed to the school and to the values it promotes. They are effectively deployed and constitute a major factor in the quality of the all-round education provided. The teachers make considerable contributions to activities outside the classroom that have a very positive impact upon pupils' development. Good policies and procedures for appraisal, professional development and the induction of new teachers, including newly qualified teachers (NQT), contribute well to the effectiveness of all staff.

Resources for Learning

The quality of resources for learning is very good. The quality of the school's information and communication technology (ICT) facilities is very good, with a comprehensive and stable campus-wide network. The resources offer very effective support to pupils' learning, including the use of interactive whiteboards to enliven teaching. However, because of building works to improve provision, present ICT facilities are temporarily insufficient to meet demand. The provision of and access to common resources such as textbooks, worksheets, printing and photocopying facilities, videos, televisions and digital cameras are also very good. The provision of specialist equipment in departments such as art, design and technology (DT) and physical education (PE) gives very good support to teaching and learning.

Libraries

Library provision in the school is very good and offers very good support for the curriculum. The premises and stock are very well managed, but the use made of them by pupils and staff is uneven, though generally sound. As a resource for personal study the library is very good in most subject areas and it is proving increasingly successful in encouraging pupils to read and research in support of their studies and for pleasure.

Premises and Accommodation

The buildings, accommodation and other facilities are good overall in terms of provision, quality and condition. Some facilities are outstanding, but certain subjects are at present housed in temporary accommodation, as they await the imminent completion of a large, new teaching area, which will further strengthen the quality of provision. The buildings, accommodation and facilities are suitable for their purpose, give good support to curriculum provision, teaching and learning and contribute positively to pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Links with Parents and the Community

The quality of links with parents and the community is very good and these bring major benefits to the pupils. Parents receive high quality information about the school. Frequent written reports and regular grading along with well-timed parents' evenings provide very good evidence of pupil progress. Among community initiatives the link with an inner-city comprehensive school, Small Heath School, is outstanding, offering insights from a different educational culture for pupils and staff.

Six out of ten parents responded to the questionnaire sent out before the inspection to elicit their views on the education provided by the school, an unusually high response. Parents were almost unanimous in appreciating the range and quality of activities provided which enrich their children's curriculum. Large numbers of the positive comments made by parents concerned their children's happiness with and enjoyment of life at Solihull and this was backed up by the high positive scores for the standard of pastoral care and support of pupils by the staff, and for the school's promotion of worthwhile values. Parents are also pleased with their children's attainment and progress, the information the school gives them and the opportunities offered for discussion with teachers. The inspectors agree with them on all of the above issues.

Pupils' Personal Development

The quality of provision for pupils' personal development is excellent. It is embedded in the school's aims, which aspire to provide pupils with as rich a life as possible at school, so that they are open to all the possibilities of being human. The school goes a long way towards achieving this vision of educating the whole person. A range of stimulating opportunities is provided, through which all pupils can increase their spiritual awareness, develop a strong moral code and learn to care for each other. Pupils relate positively to each other and develop all aspects of their personality by playing a full and active part in the rich and varied life of the community. They are offered the opportunity to take on positions of responsibility and to put into practice their care and concern for others. Parents attest to this; pupils themselves recognise it and their general demeanour around the school confirms it.

Pastoral Care

The quality of pastoral care, support and guidance is very good. The school is true to its mission statement in providing a caring, safe and empowering environment for all its pupils. Comprehensive pastoral, tutorial and guidance systems make a worthwhile contribution to the educational standards and personal development of every pupil. Measures taken to safeguard and promote pupils' welfare, health and safety are very good and are reviewed regularly. Child protection procedures and measures to promote good discipline and behaviour are in place and are effective. This commitment to care has produced a civilised ethos in which every individual feels valued and is encouraged to make his or her contribution to community life without fear of ridicule or envy.

Governance and Management

Governance and management are very good, providing clear direction for the school and generating considerable and wide-ranging achievement. Conspicuous success in overseeing the school's financial resources is to be attributed to very astute and committed governance over a good number of years, resulting in many first-class facilities and a remarkable level of funding for scholarships and bursaries. The school is well resourced. The visionary leadership of the headmaster, ably supported by his senior management team, has been singularly successful in creating a civilised environment, in which high standards of teaching and learning flourish and an unmistakable spirit of loyalty, collegiality and care pervades the

school. As a result, the school's aim to provide a rich and varied experience for all pupils is very largely met. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities support effective management at all levels through shared values and policies. While the governors have endorsed this successful transformation in school ethos, the relationship between the governors and the school community is perceived within the school to be distant and to be subject to occasional lapses in communication.

Achievement and Quality in Activities

The achievement and quality in activities are excellent. Parents' responses to the questionnaire include the word 'exceptional' and this is supported by much of the evidence gathered by the inspection team. The range, quality and availability of all that is on offer are comprehensive and the programme is driven by knowledgeable, committed and motivated staff. This is a major strength of the school.

Progress Made by the School since its Last Inspection

The school has tackled all the main recommendations of the last report, most signally in providing a "library and learning resource centre fitting for the needs of an academic institution of this quality". Some work has still to be done in implementing the school marking policy, in developing independent study across all departments, in finalising the present draft school development plan and disseminating it widely so that staff, parents and pupils can unite behind it and in reconsidering the governors' relationship with parents and staff. One or two departmental recommendations remain outstanding and these are mentioned in the body of this report.

Compliance with the Regulations for Registration

DfES Standard		Does the school meet the regulatory requirements?
1. Quality of education:	1.(2) Curriculum	Yes
	1.(3)-(5) Teaching	Yes
2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils		Yes
3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils		Yes
4. Suitability of proprietors and staff		Yes
5. Premises and accommodation		Yes
6. Provision of information		Yes
7. Manner in which complaints are to be handled		Yes

Actions Required for Compliance with the Regulatory Requirements

No action is required.

However, the school is asked to resolve any issues highlighted in *What the School Should Do Better*. These are set out as recommendations for the school in Section 2 of the report.