

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

INSPECTION OF

THE TOWERS CONVENT SCHOOL

by the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

On

8th to 11th October 2007

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

The Towers Convent School

Full Name of the School	The Towers Convent School
DCSF Number	938/6138
Registered Charity Number	229394
Address	Henfield Road, Upper Beeding, West Sussex, BN44 3TF.
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Email Address	admin@towers.w-sussex.sch.uk
Headteacher	Mrs Carole Baker
Chair of Governors	Sister Mary Andrew Fulgoney
Age Range	2 years 9 months to 16 years
Gender	2 to 8 Mixed; 9 to 16 girls
Inspection Dates	8th to 11th October 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 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 not carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate, and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report can be found 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.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 The Towers Convent School was founded in 1903 by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, when the Sisters came from France with five young French girls as their pupils. The school is situated in Upper Beeding, Steyning (West Sussex) and is part of the convent which is led by the Mother Superior. The school is a Roman Catholic school and welcomes pupils of other faiths and backgrounds.
- 1.2 The school caters for girls aged two years nine months to sixteen. Boys are admitted up to the age of eight. Two-hundred-and-ninety-two pupils attend the school. Fifteen children are in the Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception). Sixty-six pupils are in Years 1 to 6 and two-hundred-and-eleven pupils are in Years 7 to 11. Thirty-seven pupils in Years 7 to 11 board. Pupils are drawn mainly from professional families in the surrounding areas in West Sussex.
- 1.3 Christian principles underpin the work of the school. Governors and teachers seek to provide a happy, safe, secure community, with a strong Christian ethos. The vision statement, written in the form of a cross, says ‘we strive to build a loving environment where each individual is equally valued, seeking to live by our school motto “Semper Fidelis” (always faithful).’ In order to achieve these aims the staff and governors place emphasis on good self-discipline and manners. Due attention is paid to the provision of opportunities to develop leadership qualities in order to build pupils’ self-confidence and self-esteem.
- 1.4 Children enter the Early Years provision and other points in the junior department (Years 1 to 6) following an interview with parents and having spent time in the school. Pupils wishing to enter the senior department (Years 7 to 11) sit an entrance examination in mathematics, English and non-verbal reasoning. The purpose of the assessments is to ensure that pupils have the potential to thrive and flourish in the school’s environment.
- 1.5 Pupils show a wide range of abilities when they enter the school. Overall the average ability is above that of the national average, thus, if pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their GCSE results at age 16 should be above the average for all maintained schools.
- 1.6 Forty-nine pupils have been identified as needing help with their learning difficulties and disabilities. Approximately one tenth of the pupils come from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The school has thirty-two pupils for whom English is not their first language, of whom twenty-two receive additional support.
- 1.7 Significant changes have taken place since the last inspection. A governing body has been formed and the school now has its first lay headteacher. A new teaching block was opened in 2006.
- 1.8 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 Pupils enjoy a broad and interesting educational experience, which strongly meets the school's aim to identify personal strengths and to develop a love of learning firmly based on Christian principles. This is in line with the judgement of the last inspection and the school's self-evaluation. Staff work hard to encourage pupils to do their best and pupils respond, showing their commitment to play their part in fulfilling the school's aims. Parents responded very positively in their pre-inspection questionnaires to the range of experiences provided for their children. Curriculum planning has improved since the last inspection with greater consistency across the school. The strengths reported have been maintained.
- 2.2 The education throughout both the junior and senior departments contributes effectively to pupils' linguistic and mathematical development, as demonstrated by the good quality of literacy and numeracy to be found in pupils' written work and class work. The introduction of French in the junior school and Spanish in the senior school also contributes well to their linguistic development. Pupils make good progress in scientific understanding through their study of science and in other subjects, as for instance in their understanding of conservation and ecology.
- 2.3 The good use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the school, together with design and technology, contribute significantly to pupils' technological development. Pupils' personal development is well catered for by well thought out programmes of personal, social and health education (PSHE), which are taught to all year groups. Considerable emphasis is placed on the provision of creative opportunities in art, drama, dance and music, which enhances pupils' aesthetic development.
- 2.4 All pupils have opportunities to participate fully in all the activities, in line with the school's aims. Emphasis is placed on the identification and development of talent. More able pupils are suitably challenged, for example in mathematics where they are successful in national challenges. Pupils successfully prepare for examinations organised by the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music (ABRSM).
- 2.5 Good support is provided for pupils with learning difficulties, both in lessons and in sessions with a specialist teacher. The needs of pupils with English as an additional language are effectively catered for. Teachers take care to ensure that such pupils are fully involved in lessons. Where necessary, pupils are withdrawn from appropriate lessons and provided with well-planned support.
- 2.6 Preparation for the next stage of pupils' education is well structured. The good quality educational experience that they receive ensures that they move between stages in their education and into different schools and colleges with confidence. At each transition stage in the junior department and between the junior and senior departments, pupils and parents have suitable opportunities to learn about future educational provision. The smooth transfer to the senior department is aided by an induction day for pupils where they meet all the teachers who will be new to them. In the senior department, a useful careers system for older pupils helps those from Year 9 and above to learn about future opportunities and make sensible choices. Teachers know their pupils very well and this information is used to good effect to help pupils and parents in making their choices.
- 2.7 Pupils' educational experience is complemented by a range of extra-curricular activities that is extensive for a school of this size. These activities are well supported by pupils who

speaking highly of them. In the junior department, an extensive range of educational visits complements the curriculum. Pupils commented that fewer educational visits took place in Years 7 to 9.

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

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.9 The school achieves its aim to 'foster a love of learning to motivate each pupil.' Pupils are well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding, and learn to use them effectively. They achieve good standards in relation to their abilities, both in the subjects they study and in their activities. They successfully apply their knowledge, skills and understanding throughout their studies. The strengths reported in the last inspection have been maintained. Inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation that pupils achieve well in all subject areas in both the junior and senior departments. Parents are very appreciative of the standards their children attain.
- 2.10 By the end of the Foundation Stage, children have made good progress and achieve good standards. Although pupils take the national tests in Years 2, 6 and 9, the results have not always been moderated externally and national comparisons cannot be made. The results of the school's own tests and assessments show that pupils make good progress and good standards are achieved across the school. Results at GCSE are of particular note: over the most recent three years for which data is available, pupils' results in GCSE have been good for their ability, being well above the national average for all maintained schools. Pupils achieve more than twice as many A* and A grades as the national average and since the last inspection, there has been a consistent and steady rise in the proportion of grades A* to C.
- 2.11 Pupils achieve well in all areas of the education provided by the school, confirming the school's ability to meet one of its main aims, to value the unique gifts pupils bring. Pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties, those with English as an additional language, and pupils who have been identified by the school as being gifted and talented achieve well across all the areas of the education provided by the school.
- 2.12 Pupils are successful in a wide range of activities. The public speaking team won a special prize for having the best chairperson. Good results are achieved in speech and drama and the ABRSM examinations. The senior school choir performs in Christmas concerts at a church in Covent Garden, whilst the choral speaking choir has been invited to Chichester cathedral to read the lessons. The school has a sports mark for sporting excellence with pupils winning many league and tournament titles at district and county level. The good record in the mathematics national challenge for the junior department is maintained in the senior department.
- 2.13 Pupils' learning skills are well developed. They have very positive attitudes to their learning and work hard in response to the encouraging teaching and interesting lessons. Pupils show considerable skills in speaking and listening. A younger pupil confidently commented in a design and technology lesson, 'Oh, we are going to make a prototype.' Throughout the day, in lessons, activities, and at meals, pupils show high skills in conversation, listening to each other carefully and being patient with one another. The excellent relationships in the school encourage pupils to give speculative answers knowing that their ideas will be respected. In discussions, pupils carefully reason and argue their points; for example pupils in Year 4 were able to discuss decisions they would take in difficult situations and explain the possible consequences. They write fluently and read well from an early age.

- 2.14 Pupils attain good standards in numeracy. By the time they reach the end of the junior department, they are confident and competent in work with fractions and decimals. Older pupils accurately apply their mathematical skills to understanding the differences between experimental and calculated probability. Pupils across the age ranges make effective use of their mathematical skills in other subjects; for example they produce accurate graphs, diagrams, and charts. Pupils develop good skills in ICT, which are used to good effect, for example when they make presentations or compose music.
- 2.15 Pupils think for themselves as a result of careful questioning or being expected to work through issues for themselves. They show competent skills in making notes, both in lessons and when undertaking research. They organise their work well and take pride in the quality of their written work. During the inspection, older pupils with Junior Sports Leader awards competently led part of a physical education lesson.
- 2.16 Pupils settle quickly to work both independently and co-operatively and stick to the task. They show a real sense of enjoyment in the vast majority of lessons; in one lesson pupils were giggling within minutes as they took part in a highly effective self-evaluation exercise. Even on the few occasions where the pace of teaching slows, they concentrate well, applying themselves appropriately to the task set. The high take up of drama and music in the older year groups is because the pupils want to be there, as they enjoy these subjects. Pupils relish the many opportunities for involvement in extra-curricular activities which form an integral part of their educational experience. As one young pupil commented, 'There is so much to do, it is difficult to choose.'

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.17 Pupils throughout the school demonstrate outstandingly well-developed spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. The school's Christian ethos is implicit throughout the school day, with a spirit of tolerance and respect reflected in all the school's activities. The aim to develop pupils' personal growth, especially social responsibility, is very well met. The strengths reported on at the last inspection have been successfully maintained.
- 2.18 Pupils have a strong spiritual awareness. Throughout the school an atmosphere of care and respect for one another is present. This is seen when pupils comfort each other at times when they experience difficulties and when they share in each other's success. Daily assemblies, either on a class basis or for year groups, successfully enhance pupils' spiritual development. Liturgy plays an important part in the life of the school. This was seen in a service to dedicate the opening of a new music facility. Each pupil is valued as an individual so that pupils have a good sense of identity and self-esteem. Frequent contact with the Sisters enhances pupils' spiritual awareness. Respect for other faiths is a key component in the teaching of religious education. Pupils have access to the chapel in the convent and use it for quiet reflection and prayer.
- 2.19 Pupils have a very well developed sense of what is right and wrong, not just in terms of obeying the school's rules but also in doing what is morally right. The school's rules are firmly based on Christian principles, especially the ethic that pupils must treat others as they themselves would wish to be treated. Adults provide pupils with good role models in their relations with each other and with the pupils. A strong sense of community and warm relationships are strongly evident throughout the school.
- 2.20 Pupils show a high degree of social awareness throughout the school. Children in the Foundation Stage are encouraged to take account of others in their daily lives, for example by sharing resources and taking turns. As pupils move through the school they have a wide

range of opportunities for responsibility which they undertake conscientiously. The school council, the 'food committee', acting as a house captain or prefect, are examples of the rich opportunities provided. Good attention is paid to the development of pupils' understanding of what it means to be a citizen. The 'eco committees' in the junior and senior departments have led to national silver and bronze awards. Pupils have opportunities for business experience as they operate the school's 'fair trade' tuck shop.

- 2.21 Pupils respond very well to the many opportunities provided for their cultural development. The attention given to the performing arts, such as music, dance and drama, leads to pupils gaining considerable success in these areas. Pupils in the junior department in particular benefit from visits to theatres, museums, galleries and other places of educational interest. Pupils successfully learn about cultures other than their own in lessons such as French and Spanish, in religious education, and through links with the Sisters in France and Brazil. The positive ethos encourages pupils to learn from each other. One pupil commented that she liked having friends from other countries and that she could now count in Cantonese. Pupils are learning what it means to become a 'global citizen.'
- 2.22 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.23 Strong teaching is reflected in pupils' good levels of achievement and in the results of public examinations. Teaching is good across the whole of the school and a significant proportion of the teaching is excellent. This quality reflects the school's self-evaluation. In a small minority of lessons, the pace slows and pupils do not progress as rapidly as they usually do. Good quality assessment of pupils' work underpins the quality of the teaching. Teaching has improved since the last inspection so that the vast majority now promotes effective learning. The strengths reported in the last inspection have been maintained.
- 2.24 Teaching is encouraging and takes place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect between teachers and pupils that is very much appreciated by pupils. 'Teachers are focussed on the important things in lessons,' one commented. The school's very positive ethos is reflected in the desire of teachers and other staff for the pupils to do as well as they can. They are given useful opportunities to think for themselves and to increase their understanding. The quality of teaching encourages them to make the most of their intellectual, physical and creative talents.
- 2.25 Where teaching is particularly strong, teachers carefully choose an appropriate range of activities and resources. For example in a history lesson in the senior department, the teacher employed a wide range of activities, including pupils reviewing their own work, together with well-chosen and imaginatively used resources. The lesson captivated the pupils who made huge gains in their learning. Teachers are very enthusiastic and make the most of their considerable subject expertise. In an imaginative and fast paced ICT lesson in the junior department, pupils were totally involved in what they were doing and were very keen to share their success with their teacher. 'Do you want to see a wow factor?' they asked of the teacher. In a poetry lesson, pupils were mesmerised by the high quality teaching.
- 2.26 Teachers are hard working and conscientious and have a secure command of the subjects they teach. In the Foundation Stage, teachers have a good understanding of the needs of young children and of the requirements of the Foundation Stage curriculum. Teachers know the pupils very well and there is a very close match between the work provided and pupils'

differing abilities. Planning for lessons takes due account of their previous learning. Careful attention is given to enabling pupils to apply their knowledge and skills. This was evident, for example in science, when pupils calculated the variance in voltage around a circuit; in English when they identified synonyms; and in ICT to develop spread sheets to calculate the healthiness of food at breakfast.

- 2.27 A brisk pace and the effective use of time characterises most lessons, enabling pupils to make good progress. In a small minority of lessons, the pace is less demanding, pupils lose their concentration and their progress slows. Teachers make effective use of the generally good quality resources, and pupils' learning benefits. ICT is used to good effect. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils and teachers alike regard the excellent behaviour as the norm.
- 2.28 Support for pupils with learning difficulties is comprehensive both in lessons and when supported by a specialist teacher. Where necessary, detailed individual education plans have been written and provide the necessary support for individuals or groups of pupils, and teachers carefully use these. Good attention is paid to meeting the needs of pupils who have been identified as being more able through the provision of suitably challenging work. Teachers take particular care to support and involve pupils who are learning spoken English. Dictionaries are provided in lessons as well as extra attention when tasks are being explained. When necessary, pupils are withdrawn for extra well-planned support.
- 2.29 Teachers regularly and thoroughly assess their pupils' work. In the Foundation Stage, teachers make effective use of the national Foundation Stage profile. Following considerable training, the school has adopted a structure that assesses pupils' achievement against the purposes for lessons and their gains in learning. The junior department is particularly successful in its adoption of this policy, but implementation is less consistent in the senior department.
- 2.30 Across the school a wide range of assessments is used, including the nationally standardised tests in English, mathematics, and science at the end of Years 2, 6 and 9. These results have not always been marked externally to the school. Detailed and thorough analysis is undertaken of the GCSE examination results to identify where improvements could be made to the curriculum. Secure systems are in place to track pupils' progress as they move through the school and this information is used carefully to plan their work. Targets are set for pupils to aim for and progress towards them is tracked. Teachers' marking is thorough. However, the implementation of the school's marking policy is inconsistent. At its best, pupils receive written comments on how they could improve their work. Where the policy is not fully implemented teachers only provide praise and encouragement.
- 2.31 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care is excellent and reflects the school's aim to care for the individual. The strengths reported at the last inspection have been maintained and the management structure for pastoral care has been improved. The quality of care provided is fully supportive of the national *Every Child Matters* agenda and is in line with the school's expectations as a Catholic foundation. Careful attention is generally given to the health and safety of pupils. Pupils are very appreciative of the care they receive and describe the school as being 'a large family who care for each other.' Parents are very appreciative of the care their children receive.
- 3.2 An ethos of mutual trust underpins the work of the school, strongly supported by the PSHE programme. Relationships between adults and pupils and among pupils are excellent. The relationships between older and younger pupils are very good. For example older pupils help younger ones at lunch. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, the pupils indicated that they are very positive about what the school does for them. 'What I love about this school is that everybody cares about each other' commented one pupil. They feel that teachers and the Sisters give them effective support in their work and in their lives. These views are strongly supported by the inspection evidence.
- 3.3 Teachers know their pupils as individuals and use this knowledge to very good effect. The commitment of class and form teachers to the well-being and happiness of the pupils is at the heart of the excellent pastoral care. They are well supported by the co-ordinator for the junior department and by the recently appointed Key Stage co-ordinators in the senior department. Effective links between boarding and day staff enhance pastoral care. Teachers are also well supported by pastoral arrangements which operate successfully, despite at times relying too much on informal arrangements. Staff are familiar with the school's policies and implement them conscientiously.
- 3.4 Effective arrangements are in place and implemented to promote good behaviour. They are known by the pupils who regard them as being fair. The discipline codes do not have to be applied very often, because of the pupils' excellent behaviour. Pupils interviewed by inspectors commented that the rules were for their benefit. Thorough and conscientious attention is paid to the prevention of harassment and bullying. When asked about bullying in meetings with inspectors, pupils were sure that it was not an issue in the school. They were quite clear that they would readily confide in an adult should they experience such difficulties. The excellent example set by all adults in the school community and the high standards expected by them enhance the quality of behaviour. Pupils from a wide range of cultural backgrounds work and play very harmoniously and enjoy learning about each other's cultural backgrounds.
- 3.5 Secure arrangements are made and generally implemented carefully to promote and safeguard pupils' welfare, health and safety. Attendance and admission registers are completed correctly. Prompt checks are made should a pupil be absent without an explanation. Fire protection is thorough. First aid is very well provided for. Thorough risk assessments are made for educational visits.
- 3.6 Conscientious attention is given to child protection. The policy is up to date and all staff have had the necessary training. Criminal Records Bureau checks have been made on all

adults and are central to the school's recruitment reflecting the safer recruitment training undertaken by senior staff and a trustee. A central record is now in place.

- 3.7 Emphasis is placed on healthy living. Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily. Meals are nutritious and the menu is well balanced. Emphasis is placed in science and physical education on the importance of developing healthy lifestyles. Pupils have many opportunities to take exercise and are urged to do so. Due attention is paid to teaching pupils about the dangers of the misuse of drugs, alcohol, and smoking.
- 3.8 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.9 Links between the school and both its parents and the wider community are well developed and in line with the school's self-evaluation. These links support the achievement of the school's aim to work in partnership with parents. The strengths highlighted in the previous report have been maintained.
- 3.10 Parents are extremely satisfied with the education and support provided for their children. In their replies to the questionnaire sent out prior to the inspection, parents indicated strong support for the school showing particular appreciation of the high standards of behaviour, the progress made by their children, the attitudes and values promoted and the help provided by the teachers. Inspection evidence confirms parents' positive views.
- 3.11 Useful opportunities are provided for parents to be involved in the life of the school and in the work and progress of their children. They have contributed significantly to a planting day as part of the eco-project in the junior department, provided valuable support for the Year 6 cycling proficiency scheme and set up a 'beachside café' during a sponsored walk. Parents regularly support the concerts and plays. The Parent Teacher Association works hard to provide social interaction between parents and the school and also raises funds for projects with direct benefit for the pupils such as the purchase of musical instruments, improvement of drama facilities and provision of equipment for use in design and technology lessons.
- 3.12 Parents are provided with a wide range of helpful information which keeps them well informed. The school's useful web site includes policy documentation, historical background of the school, recent newsletters and pupils' and boarders' handbooks. The school development plan indicates that this is to be translated into several languages. Regular newsletters, an informative prospectus, and a parental handbook provide a helpful insight into school life and encourage parents to feel part of the school.
- 3.13 Regular, helpful and detailed information about their children's progress is provided. Parents of pupils with learning difficulties are kept well informed about the provision being made for their children and reviews of progress. Parents value the informative school reports. However, the lack of consistency between subjects hinders their effectiveness. A particular strength in the reports in the senior department is the pupils' own assessment of their performance. Parents meetings are held regularly and these formal occasions are supported by the school's openness; staff and the headteacher are perceived by parents as being approachable and willing to see parents whenever necessary.
- 3.14 The school handles the concerns of parents with due care. Parents have access to an appropriate complaints procedure and feel comfortable about raising concerns with the

school. Records of informal as well as formal parental complaints are kept together with a record of any action taken.

- 3.15 A good number of useful links have been established with the wider community. The school's chapel is used for Saturday night Mass. School mini buses help transport children with disabilities and also pupils from the local primary school. The choir sings carols locally and pupils provide a strawberry tea for elderly people. Older pupils have joined the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. The school actively supports local and national charities such as helping homeless Brazilian children and organising a Macmillan coffee morning. There are strong links with the local Catholic community. The range and extent of links with the community contribute significantly to pupils' all round personal development.
- 3.16 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

The Quality of Boarding Education

- 3.17 The supportive and homely ethos of the boarding arrangements successfully promotes pupils' welfare and makes a positive contribution to their educational experience. Despite several changes of staff, the strengths reported at the last inspection have been maintained. The school has carefully attended to the matters requiring attention listed in the Commission for Social Care (CSCI) inspection report in 2003 and their follow up report in 2005.
- 3.18 Relationships within the boarding provision are very positive and the boarders themselves are enthusiastic about their boarding experience. Pupils commented that they felt relaxed, supported and safe and that boarding was like being in a family; for example on occasion boarders visit a local Chinese restaurant for a meal. The provision of a warm and positive family atmosphere is a key part of the boarding provision. Pupils new to boarding are given a 'guardian' who helps them to settle in.
- 3.19 An interesting range of activities is provided in the evenings and at weekends. Pupils have recently been involved in activities as diverse as swimming, blackberry picking, an excursion to a major theme park and shopping. Pupils comment that they like the variety. The new head of boarding has plans in hand to extend the range further. The programme of activities is managed and implemented effectively.
- 3.20 The upper floors of the older part of the school provide the pupils with adequate accommodation. The dormitories have been refurbished and ample space is provided for personal possessions and family photographs. The showers have been improved, especially the control of the water temperature but not all boarders find it easy to operate the new system. Common rooms are reasonably well furnished and pupils are provided with an appropriate range of equipment such as televisions.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The pupils at The Towers Convent School benefit from a good quality education sustained initially by the governance of the trustees and more recently by the governing body. At the time of the last inspection, governance and management was in the care of the trustees of the Community of the Blessed Sacrament. The Mother Superior had overall responsibility for the religious community and the boarders.
- 4.2 The school is part of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament and it is the duty of the resident Mother Superior, a trustee, to report to the Mother House in France. In June 2006 the trustees established a governing body comprising a majority of trustees and lay persons appointed by them. The governing body has only just started to operate. The structure and management arrangements of the newly formed governing body are well defined in their terms of reference.
- 4.3 Many members of the governing body have had a long association with the school, know it well, and have a care and concern for its development. They are aware of their responsibilities and are appropriately involved in educational development and financial planning through their oversight of, and contribution to, the school development plan. The governing body benefits from the presence of members with defined expertise in a number of useful areas. Governors are developing strategies to ensure effective educational provision and investment in both human and material resources. For example, during the inspection the amount of secretarial support was increased.
- 4.4 The prudent management of finances by the trustees, and more recently by the governors ensures that the school is on a sound footing. Over the past few years the school has built a teaching block which houses eight classrooms, two science laboratories, a drama and dance studio and a music school.
- 4.5 Although the trustees on the governing body have a good insight into the working of the school and enjoy a close working relationship with the headteacher, providing effective advice and support, the governing body as a whole has not had enough time to gain the necessary insight. The trustees and teachers have ensured that due attention is paid to the safeguarding of the welfare of the pupils. Plans are in place to develop appropriate committees and all members of the governing body are fully committed to support the effective oversight of the school through working in partnership.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.6 Those with leadership and management responsibilities successfully ensure the fulfilment of the school's aim to provide an education where pupils achieve well in a happy, safe, secure community firmly rooted in Christian principles. The headteacher has recently extended the management structure to extend opportunities for staff to have leadership and management experience. Currently, roles and responsibilities are not sufficiently clear within the new structure. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.
- 4.7 The headteacher provides good leadership through her commitment to the school's ethos, and her much-appreciated support for the staff. The headteacher is very actively involved with teachers and pupils in the management of the school. Pupils are treated as individuals and the school is led and managed on this basis. Staff respond well to the leadership and

- work well as a team, but reliance on informal arrangements, which are implicit, rather than clear explicit procedures, hinders communication. The senior management team have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need improvement.
- 4.8 A succinct development plan with careful costings, success criteria, and time scale for implementation guides the development of the school. The plan is based on a thorough review by staff and governors of the quality of education provided. Staff with responsibility for individual subjects have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects and have developed detailed schemes of work. The head of the junior department provides very effective leadership. The management of support for those with learning difficulties and for those with English as an additional language is effective.
- 4.9 The middle management has been extended in order to give more staff leadership responsibilities, and to reduce the overloading of the role of the headteacher reported at the last inspection. Staff undertake these roles enthusiastically. Nevertheless, the roles and responsibilities of all middle managers are not well defined, especially with regard to reporting to the senior leadership team. As a result, inconsistencies remain, for example in the implementation of the school's assessment policy, including marking.
- 4.10 Staff development is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. Essential training for teaching and non-teaching staff in areas such as child protection and health and safety has been provided, as well as a wide range of more specialist individual training. Effective arrangements are in place to induct both newly qualified teachers using the national scheme, and staff new to the school, especially if this is the first Roman Catholic school in which they have taught. Teacher appraisal is securely in place.
- 4.11 Finances are managed prudently by the trustees and bursar, and more recently by the governors. A new teaching block was opened in 2006, and during the inspection a new music facility was opened. Resources are sufficient for the curriculum, and the accommodation is in a good state of repair. However, the stops on the upstairs windows in the new building are not always used correctly, and a few upstairs windows in another part of the school where pupils congregate are not fitted with the necessary stops.
- 4.12 Teachers are well deployed and are sufficient to meet the aims of the school. Careful and thorough attention is paid to checking the suitability of staff, supply staff and governors. Administration is sound but is hampered by the location of the school's office and headteachers' office being far apart and on different floors. The governors have very recently made arrangements to improve the amount of secretarial help.
- 4.13 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff [Standards 4].
- 4.14 The school meets most of the regulatory requirements for premises and accommodation [Standard 5]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) ensure that the stops on the upstairs windows in the new building are used correctly and that stops are fitted to all upstairs windows in other parts of the school. [Regulation 5.(j)].
- 4.15 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 is successful in its aim to provide a happy, safe, secure community with a strong Christian ethos. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding as is the pastoral care. Boarding provision is good. The stimulating educational experience, together with effective teaching, provide an environment in which pupils are happy and achieve well. Pupils speak very well of their school and are proud of it. Pupils are well educated and achieve good standards in relation to their abilities, including those who are more able, as well as those with learning difficulties and those learning spoken English. In line with its aims, the school successfully nurtures talent in whatever area it may lie. Pupils achieve high standards in creative aspects of the curriculum such as dance, music, drama, and choral speaking. Pupils achieve well in sport, as do pupils in mathematics who do well in the national mathematics challenge. The headteacher provides good leadership through her commitment to the school's aims, her hard work and the much-appreciated support she provides for the staff. Those in management positions, together with the Sisters, ensure the school's ethos and working environment reflect the Christian principles on which the school is based. Recently more staff have been brought into management positions. Lines of responsibility within the new structure are not defined clearly enough. The staff work effectively as a team. At times over reliance is placed on implicit arrangements rather than explicit procedures. Consequently not all staff are fully aware of decisions made and action to be taken. The newly formed governing body is well placed to undertake its responsibilities. Parents are very supportive of the school.
- 5.2 Significant progress has made since the last inspection. The management structure has been extended. Consistency and continuity within the curriculum and assessment have been strengthened. A comprehensive programme for staff development has been introduced. Increased attention is now given by those with management responsibilities to the evaluation of teaching, learning, and the curriculum.
- 5.3 The school complies with most of the regulatory requirements, but does not at present meet Standard 5 (premises and accommodation).

Next Steps

- 5.4 To continue the significant improvement the school has made since the last inspection it should:
1. ensure that the responsibilities of those in management positions are clearly defined;
 2. provide clear written procedures to replace current informal arrangements.
- 5.5 In order to meet all the regulatory requirements, the school must:
- (1) ensure that the stops on the upstairs windows in the new building are used correctly and that stops are fitted to all upstairs windows in other parts of the school. [Regulation 5.(j)].

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 8th to 11th October 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, parents, and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the sanatorium. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mr Rod Sharman	Reporting Inspector
Ms Mary Burrige	Former Head, GSA junior school
Mrs Rosemary Chapman	Head of Department, GSA school
Mrs Anne Farnish	Head, GSA junior school
Mrs Patricia Taylor	Former Head, GSA school
Mrs Sara Wiggins	Former Head, ISA junior school
Mr Patrick Wilson	Head, ISA school