

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Aldenham Preparatory School

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

Full Name of the School	Aldenham Preparatory School
DCSF Number	919/6003
Early Years Number	EY239742
Registered Charity Number	298140
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Age Range	3 to 11
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	24th to 27th November 2008

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

The statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage were not inspected as part of this inspection.

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 Aldenham Preparatory School is a co-educational day school for pupils between the ages of three and eleven years. It is the junior school of Aldenham School whose foundation by Master Brewer, Richard Platt, dates back to 1597. The preparatory school was established in September 2003. The last inspection took place in October 2002 when the school comprised a nursery and pre-preparatory department for pupils aged two to seven years. The school is set alongside the senior school in extensive grounds in the Hertfordshire countryside to the northwest of London, near Elstree. As a new and developing school, the spacious accommodation and facilities, indoors and outdoors, are either newly built or recently redesigned, refurbished and equipped. The wider facilities of the senior school, such as the sports hall, games fields and theatre are available to the preparatory school. As part of Aldenham School, the preparatory school has the same board of governors who are appointed by the educational charitable trust, the Aldenham School Company. The Worshipful Company of Brewers appoints their Upper Warden as their representative on the governing body.
- 1.2 The overall mission of the school is to provide a happy, nurturing and warm environment where quality learning takes place and the needs and talents of each individual child are fulfilled. The school aims to encourage a love of learning in order to aspire to academic excellence and give all pupils a broad education with rich and stimulating experiences in a well-planned, well-organised environment. It also aims to foster good relationships and partnership between staff, pupils, parents and the wider community and to emphasise the importance of the social, moral and spiritual dimensions of community life in a modern society.
- 1.3 Extensive changes have taken place since then. The nursery was restructured in September 2006 to take its youngest children at the age of three. Most recently, a new, well-equipped kitchen has been added for the three to four year old children. The most recent inspection by Ofsted of the school's Early Years provision took place in June 2008; the provision was judged as outstanding and no recommendations were made. The present headmaster took up his appointment in the autumn term of 2007.
- 1.4 The school has one form per year from the Reception year group onwards. It is a mixed school of 163 pupils, 111 boys and 52 girls. There are 44 pupils in the Nursery and Reception year groups, the Early Years Foundation Stage, 41 in Years 1 and 2, and 78 in Years 3 to 6. Most pupils join at the age of three and continue through the school to Year 6. Prospective pupils are admitted to the school on the basis of an interview with the headmaster, a reference from their previous school and academic testing. The school is divided into the Early Years Foundation Stage, the pre-preparatory department which includes Years 1 and 2, and the preparatory department from Year 3 to Year 6. Pupils are mostly taught by their class teachers up to Year 6, although with an increased amount of specialist teaching in Years 5 and 6.
- 1.5 The majority of pupils live within a radius of five miles from the school. They mostly come from families with business or professional backgrounds. Most pupils join the school in the Nursery or Reception year groups; additional pupils may enter older classes from time to time. The majority of Year 6 pupils proceed to local selective independent schools, including Aldenham itself.

- 1.6 The range of ability is relatively wide within each year group; a small proportion of pupils are below average in ability, and a much higher proportion are above or well above average. Standardised tests indicate that the overall ability profile of current pupils is above the national average. The school is a Christian foundation and the majority of pupils are British; however, several different cultures and faiths are represented, reflecting the wide range of ethnic backgrounds in the local population. Virtually all pupils have English as their first language; none requires specialist support in English as an additional language. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The school has identified 45 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Sixteen of these pupils receive specialist learning support from the school; the remainder are regularly monitored and may receive in-class assistance.
- 1.7 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 school provides a range of carefully considered educational opportunities which are well suited to the interest, aptitudes and needs of all its pupils. The educational experience which its pupils enjoy very successfully encompasses the school's declared aims to provide a broad education in a well-planned, well-organised environment which gives children rich and stimulating experiences and encourages them to make the most of their own special talents. Parents in their replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire were unanimous that the school provides an appropriate range of subjects in the curriculum and a good range of extra-curricular subjects. Pupils were also enthusiastic about the range of activities they were able to enjoy. At the time of the previous inspection, the oldest children in the school were in Year 2 and the school now extends to Year 6. Since then, as recommended, the timetable for Years 1 and 2 has been reorganised and their curriculum has been planned to ensure the most effective use of time over the week. Significant improvements have also been made to the teaching accommodation, resources and outdoor play provision for the Nursery and Reception children and those in Years 1 and 2.
- 2.2 Pupils experience a broad education, with a suitable and fair allocation of time within the present school day for the various subjects. It has the additional advantages of French with a specialist teacher from Reception onwards and a weekly lesson in thinking skills from Year 3. Pupils are given very good opportunities to develop their linguistic, speaking and listening skills from the Early Years Foundation Stage upwards. Scientific, mathematical and numeracy skills are also well developed throughout the age groups, although time for investigative work is limited. Considerable investment has been made in resources and facilities for information and communication technology (ICT), and pupils benefit from electronic whiteboards in use across the school. They have very good opportunities to develop their skills in ICT lessons in the new suite and to use them to advantage across the curriculum. Design and technology (DT), which profits from a new room designed to be shared with art and science, is advancing well as a subject; pupils also benefit from visits to the DT workshops in the senior school. History, geography, religious education (RE) and personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) all contribute significantly to successful human and social development. Lessons in physical education (PE), in art and in music, where a major investment has been made to provide all Year 3 pupils with violins, all make a very positive contribution to physical, aesthetic and creative development.
- 2.3 The programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education successfully reflects the school's aims and ethos. A significant number of pupils benefit from a worthwhile range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in the preparatory department. A programme of varied activities is offered by enthusiastic staff; the most popular are repeated for different age groups. The quality of this provision is enhanced by the specialist music, speech and drama staff, and also by the specialist sports staff from the senior school who teach in the preparatory school. Boys enjoy a variety of sports, and activities for girls are being progressively developed as their numbers grow. Pupils are also enthusiastically involved in a range of fund-raising activities and events; they choose charities to support each term. The out-of-school visits programme supports the enrichment of the curriculum very successfully.
- 2.4 Pupils at each stage of the school have excellent preparation for their transition to the next phase of their education. Within the school, pupils of all ages from Reception upwards gain positive advantage from their shared access to buildings and facilities and to specialist staff. In line with current good practice, children in Nursery and Reception make very good use of the extensive grounds which surround the school, while pupils in Years 1 and 2 use the

preparatory department's facilities for music lessons. Physical education lessons take place in the senior school sports hall. Pupils benefit from these strong links and the comprehensive sharing of information between staff from stage to stage. Staff from the music and PE departments in the senior school teach in the preparatory school. Senior school science, art, and design and technology staff co-operate enthusiastically to extend opportunities to preparatory school pupils and staff. During the summer term, Year 6 pupils spend half-days in different departments in the senior school and Year 5 classes have visits arranged through the year. Subject co-ordinators meet their counterparts in the senior school to discuss continuity of the curriculum.

- 2.5 The curriculum is well planned overall and schemes of work indicate that planning within most subjects is complete, and is efficient and effective. Excellent planning to meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage takes place in the Nursery and Reception classes. In addition, links with the curriculum in the senior school are increasingly taken into consideration. All pupils are given every encouragement and opportunity in each area of the curriculum, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pre-preparatory department where they are very well supported in their individual learning and progress. Excellent use is made of the school grounds to enhance the curriculum. Early Years Foundation Stage children have an outdoor classroom and a covered outdoor area for play and learning activities. The introduction of a scheme for teaching grammar and the sounds of letters at an early age has also been successful. In the preparatory department, where, as a new school, the planning is still evolving, pressures on the curriculum have restricted the time allotted to science and this is currently under review. However, senior school science staff arrange special science days for the preparatory school. Through participation in cultural and sporting events, the school is establishing firm links with the local community.
- 2.6 Very effective provision is made for pupils with special educational needs, learning difficulties or disabilities; they are well integrated into lessons. The special educational needs co-ordinator has worked hard to develop and implement a rigorous policy for learning support throughout the school, based on records of concern noted by staff. Extremely careful consideration is given to provision for those pupils who have very specific needs; individual educational plans and regular reviews are correctly and efficiently prepared and implemented. Advances in technology are used to excellent effect and a multi-sensory, very child-centred approach is extremely successfully used in individual lessons with pupils in Years 1 and 2. The policy for gifted and talented pupils has been prepared and, although it is not yet fully implemented, classes in thinking skills have been introduced, and also enrichment work for the most able. Staff are very aware of pupils who have been identified as having higher ability and they are given more challenging work and have special lessons; some excellent projects were seen. Pupils with English as an additional language are given very good personalised support when this is necessary.
- 2.7 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.8 Pupils are well educated in relation to their ages, abilities, needs, gender, ethnic origin and circumstances. In their subjects and activities, they are well grounded in the relevant knowledge, skills and understanding. They apply these effectively and develop well the essential skills and attitudes for work and study. The school is successfully meeting its aim to encourage a love of learning and ensure that each pupil is able to make the most of his or her own special talents. Pupils enjoy their work; they are focused and able to sustain concentration. Since the previous inspection, the school has developed its house system and house events give pupils a wide range of opportunities to meet with success. Pupils were unanimous in replies to their pre-inspection questionnaire that they are helped to learn and to do things for themselves.
- 2.9 Pupils demonstrate good critical and creative thinking and understanding across a range of subjects, particularly in speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematical competence. By the end of Year 6, pupils display a high level of skill, and are particularly competent in literacy and mathematics. This competence is encouraged from an early age; children in a Year 1 lesson named solid shapes such as cubes, cones, cylinders and triangular prisms chosen from a variety of food containers and then proceeded, in their groups, to discuss and enjoy building a fairy-tale castle or a garage or an airport with their collection. Logical thought and the use of ICT are developing well throughout the curriculum and the school makes effective use of the electronic whiteboards in all the year groups.
- 2.10 Pupils achieve well in lessons and in their written work at all ability levels, including those with learning difficulties. More able pupils achieve success across all areas of the curriculum and have access to a range of enrichment activities to develop their independent study skills.
- 2.11 No significant differences are apparent in the relative attainment of different groups of pupils in subjects or curriculum areas across the school. A recent analysis of results of standardised measures of progress indicates that the school is enabling pupils to achieve good progress for their abilities from Year 2 to Year 6. Pupils' attainment in nationally standardised tests at age ten in non-verbal reasoning is well above the national average. At age eleven, promising pupils have gained academic scholarships to their chosen senior schools.
- 2.12 Pupils' significant individual and group or team achievements include excellent results in music and speech and drama examinations and participation to a high level in activities such as sailing and equestrian events; the school actively supports and contributes towards the activities of its high-achieving pupils. The individual achievements of all pupils are celebrated in a fortnightly achievement assembly. Pupils all enjoy this experience and many are rewarded for their hard work, effort and determination. This assembly promotes the aim of the school to ensure that individual pupils are nurtured and encouraged to make the most of their own special talents.
- 2.13 Excellent examples of the ability of pupils to take notes were observed in English in Years 5 and 6. From Year 3 onwards, all pupils are able to organise their work independently. Their workbooks are well presented and they are well prepared for lessons. In the pre-preparatory department, pupils have talking partners, and this gives them opportunities to share ideas and discuss their work with great confidence. Their early experience enables pupils to study and work constructively together in groups and teams as they move up through the school.

- 2.14 Pupils settle to their tasks in class very well and quickly. They apply what they know and clearly enjoy their work and activities. This was highlighted in pupil interviews where pupils talked enthusiastically about the school and all that it has to offer.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.15 Throughout the school, the pupils demonstrate outstandingly well-developed spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. The school very successfully fulfils its aim to emphasise the importance of the social, moral and spiritual dimensions of community life in modern society. This ensures that pupils do receive a rich, stimulating experience and are valued as individuals. Personal, social, health and citizenship education lessons support particularly well the development of moral and social awareness throughout the school. Parents, in their replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire, were unanimous that the school promotes worthwhile attitudes and views.
- 2.16 Pupils' spiritual development is excellent, partly as a result of a thoughtfully planned programme of worship through assemblies which includes eagerly awaited regular visits from the senior school chaplain. In one assembly, the young audience were delighted, and in true awe and wonder, with the enactment of the story of the wedding at Cana and the miraculous changing of water into wine. Pupils show sensitive spiritual awareness in relevant topics in RE and PSHCE and they appreciate the natural beauty of the countryside in which the school is set. Pupils throughout the school are encouraged to think and ask questions; their opinions are respected and therefore they develop high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. This is exemplified by pupils' articulacy in discussions and their confidence to speak and perform in front of others, evident in assemblies and lessons. Teachers foster their pupils' self-esteem and knowledge through the support they provide and by valuing them as individuals.
- 2.17 Pupils have a very strong and well-developed moral sense and distinguish clearly between right and wrong from an early age. They find the school rules fair and helpful, as highlighted in the pupil interviews. Each class has discussed and arrived at its own guidelines about behaviour and has its own special display, and this, together with their caring, kind and respectful attitude to one another, encourages all pupils to behave in an exemplary manner.
- 2.18 Pupils' outstanding level of social development is reflected in their demeanour around the school, throughout all age groups. They converse amicably with each other and with adults. Pupils enjoy and take seriously the opportunities to contribute to the development of their school provided through participation in their school council. Personal, social, health and citizenship education lessons give them a good introduction to their understanding of elements of civic life. Pupils speak proudly of the many instances of successful charitable fund-raising events which are publicised throughout the school; these are frequently organised through the house system and involve all sections of the school.
- 2.19 Pupils' outstanding cultural development is promoted through an interesting range of activities, visits and special studies. From an early age, pupils enjoy participating in music and drama activities and these together with visiting speakers, excursions to various galleries, museums and residential visits help them develop awareness of the arts. Year 6 pupils talked with delight and appreciation about their visit to the scene of Constable's *The Hay Wain*. Pupils also show appreciation and respect for other cultures. Pupils from different family backgrounds mix very naturally; they learn from each other and enjoy a vast range of opportunities within many curriculum areas to appreciate their own cultural traditions and the diversity of others. Pupils in RE lessons in the pre-preparatory department celebrated the birth of Jesus, and evidence of pupils celebrating festivals such as Eid, Diwali and Hanukkah was portrayed in their workbooks and in displays around the school. Parents are invited into

lessons to explain how children are welcomed into the world in different religious traditions, and delightful photographs showed pupils enacting the various celebrations. All are given equal status and this not only contributes effectively to pupils' knowledge of celebration across cultures but also to their appreciation and understanding of diversity in cultures.

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

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.21 Pupils enjoy effective and enthusiastic teaching. The overall quality of teaching throughout the school is good, with outstanding practice observed in over one third of lessons. The school amply fulfils its aim to encourage a love of learning in order to aspire to academic excellence and a broad education for all pupils; the staff, through their excellent emphasis on display of an exceptionally high standard, also provide a very well-planned, well-organised and extremely stimulating environment. Since the previous inspection, as the school has grown, teachers have developed the curriculum, their planning and their methods of assessment. Marking is regular and effective. Teaching assistants, who are attached to each class, are used effectively and make an important contribution, particularly in the individual help and support they give in class where necessary. The teaching benefits from accommodation, resources and outdoor play provision which have all been developed to a high standard; the outdoor play and teaching area for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is particularly fine. Every classroom has an electronic whiteboard which teachers use efficiently, although the interactive facility is not yet used to its full capacity. Two new libraries have been created and are now in the process of development as centres for teaching and learning. An efficient framework for assessment has been established and the effective use of the data it has produced is being steadily developed.
- 2.22 Teachers are well-qualified and knowledgeable; they communicate clearly, enabling pupils of all ages and abilities to make good and often rapid progress. They share their enthusiasm and high expectations with their pupils. This includes pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, who are carefully taken into consideration in lesson planning and receive effective teaching within classes, together with additional classroom support where necessary. The more able pupils make good progress through carefully directed questioning by teachers and, where appropriate, by the provision of more demanding tasks, well suited to their needs. The enrichment programme of activities is also making an important contribution. The majority of teaching undoubtedly enables pupils to increase their understanding and develop their skills, as observed in lessons across all subjects.
- 2.23 During lessons, skilled questioning by teachers challenges individual pupils at levels appropriate to their ability, thus extending their knowledge. In the majority of lessons observed, pupils were encouraged to think for themselves and become independent learners. However, some unduly lengthy introductions and explanations in a few lessons limited the opportunity for pupils to develop and learn independently. Teachers' high expectations of pupils, combined with continual support, are a strong motivating factor in pupils' application, perseverance and enjoyment of learning and also their high standard of behaviour.
- 2.24 Teachers plan lessons thoroughly and meticulously. From Nursery through to Year 6 the detail in almost all lesson planning contributes to the efficient progress of lessons. Aims and objectives are clearly stated and are shared with the pupils so that they know what is expected of them. Activities are well planned to suit the ages of the pupils and the majority of lessons throughout the school make effective use of the time available, moving at a good pace.

- 2.25 Effective use of ‘pupil of the week’ awards, house points and stars to praise and reward good work encourages and motivates pupils of all ages. Staff use a range of approaches relevant to pupils’ ages and stages of development and this ensures their interest is sustained and they are challenged to think and apply themselves to the tasks presented.
- 2.26 Teachers are confident in their expertise and professional knowledge, which together with their awareness of the pupils in their care, enables them capably to adapt their lessons to suit the needs of the pupils. This allows them to focus on a particular interest of their pupils, and thereby develop their motivation.
- 2.27 A plentiful supply of resources for teaching is provided, and these are used well. Classrooms are spacious, bright and airy. The display in classrooms and corridors around the school is a model of excellent practice. As a new school, resources generally are up-to-date and are of good quality. Teachers make good use of ICT and it is used appropriately in all subjects. There are excellent ICT facilities in a specialist room, together with computers and electronic whiteboards in all teaching areas and electronic key boards for music lessons. A new specialist teaching room for art and DT encourages development in these creative subjects; it is also used for science, although not extensively as yet. Playground areas in the school are inviting and encourage opportunities for lively interaction, giving pupils, especially those in the pre-preparatory department, many opportunities to develop social skills through play, and to enjoy break-times. The covered play area for Nursery and Reception, together with their new outdoor classroom, ensures that access to the outdoors for teaching and learning can occur all year round. Pupils have enjoyed watching their chickens hatch and grow, and now they can collect their eggs. The libraries in both the pre-preparatory and preparatory departments have recently moved to new locations. The quantity of books and teaching resources do not yet create a comfortable and stimulating learning environment appropriate to each age group.
- 2.28 In the Early Years Foundation Stage and the pre-preparatory department, good written observations and photographic evidence contribute to the careful assessment of individual pupils. Pupils’ work is assessed in accordance with the school’s framework for marking and assessment. Marking is highly informative, constructive and consistent across all subjects and areas of the school. Pupils remarked that they received helpful oral feedback from teachers on work that had been marked and appreciated this. Pupils are also given individual targets and a system of self-assessment allows them to see what progress they have made and what else they need to do to improve further. Teaching throughout the school includes regular assessment of pupils’ progress and a system is in place to measure and track pupils’ progress over time in mathematics and English.
- 2.29 Nationally standardised tests of attainment and progress have been introduced and are being evaluated. The results from these useful assessments are being tracked but are not yet used extensively to aid planning and further develop pupils across the range of abilities.
- 2.30 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 the school makes full and appropriate arrangements to secure the welfare, health and safety of pupils. The entire staff, from the Early Years Foundation Stage upwards, care extremely effectively for the well-being and development of pupils of all ages, and they are supported by a most effective management structure. The school successfully achieves its aim to provide a happy, nurturing and warm environment where quality learning for each individual is fulfilled. Parents referred to flourishing, happy children and praised the pastoral care, the supportive, helpful staff, and the atmosphere of kindness. Pupils' responses to questions about this aspect of school life were overwhelmingly positive and very much to the credit of the staff, and an acknowledgement of the excellence of the standards and traditions this new school is establishing. As recommended by the previous inspection, the admission register has received effective attention and is now centrally and electronically administered.
- 3.2 Staff provide outstanding support and guidance for their pupils. Class teachers have the primary responsibility and they understand their roles and duties very well; they are strongly committed to them and carry them out with great diligence and care. The teaching assistants also play a very important part in the classroom dynamics. The headmaster and deputy head have overall responsibility for pastoral care and know the pupils well, through their teaching commitments and their open-door policy, and are always made aware of any particular problem or issues. They liaise closely with teachers and, in turn, provide them with helpful support and guidance where necessary. The size of the school also helps bonds to be formed more quickly than in a larger school; any problems are more immediately apparent and can be acted upon quickly. Pastoral records are carefully kept and are passed on from year to year, including on transition to the senior school.
- 3.3 Relationships between teachers and the pupils they teach are very close. The teachers know their pupils very well and provide exemplary role models. They treat pupils with great courtesy and respect, exercising a gentle but firm authority founded on high expectations and a real concern for their pupils' personal well-being, as well as for academic performance. As a result, pupils display complete confidence and trust in their teachers.
- 3.4 The atmosphere of mutual respect, courtesy and purposefulness that teachers and their assistants create in their classrooms encourages pupils to respect and support each other. This is illustrated by the manner in which pupils listen to each other, and by how well they work together in small groups and play in the playground.
- 3.5 From an early age, high standards of behaviour and discipline are encouraged and pupils learn to behave towards each other with an emotional maturity and mutual respect. Pupils do not regard bullying as an issue, but are very clear about what they would do if they or their friends encountered such a problem. In relation to bullying and other concerns, pupils expressed great confidence in approaching any member of staff.
- 3.6 The school has a clear and appropriate system of carefully considered sanctions and rewards. Sanctions vary from a short time away from an enjoyable experience to daily or weekly report cards to parents. The system has a strong focus on positively rewarding good behaviour, kindness, collaboration and achievement. The pupils are rewarded for good behaviour in a variety of ways. Verbal praise and encouragement in front of peers is consistently used. There is a star system throughout the school, and a house point system is

in use from Year 3 upwards. Pupils enjoy earning points in the hope of their house winning the cup at the end of the year. In alternate weeks, there is an achievement assembly where the attainment of individuals and groups of pupils is celebrated. Certificates and badges are awarded. Awards are recorded in a special book for good work and achievement and this is displayed in the entrance hall.

- 3.7 The health and safety of pupils are catered for extremely effectively. A comprehensive child protection policy results in very good practice in this area. All staff are checked by the Criminal Records Bureau, and references are taken up correctly. Pupils are closely supervised at all times, including play-time, at lunch-time, and during pre- and post-school activities. The school buildings and grounds provide a well-maintained and appropriate environment for pupils in all respects. The effective measures which are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards are carefully monitored.
- 3.8 Medical and first-aid protocols are laid out clearly in the staff handbook, with all the other carefully considered welfare, health and safety procedures. Staff are fully trained in medical and first-aid practices at an appropriate level. Pupils who are unwell or suffer minor injuries are cared for in a small, correctly equipped medical room in the preparatory school, while any serious problems are referred to the senior school medical centre where a qualified nurse is always on call. There are clear and very appropriate arrangements for school trips, and a detailed and careful risk assessment is done prior to visits, identifying very clearly potential hazards and how the organisation of groups and individuals can avoid these risks. Daily attendance registers and associated procedures for lateness and absence are completed carefully and correctly.
- 3.9 The school has an efficient and effective health and safety committee. It meets regularly and has been involved fully in the comprehensive development and practice of procedures, in line with regulations, to minimise health and safety risks.
- 3.10 The lunches prepared for pupils by the catering staff are healthy, nutritious, appetising and popular. All pupils from Reception upwards have lunch in the senior school dining hall, and it is a pleasant social occasion where they learn the good manners that accompany social eating. Pupils themselves are certain that they eat healthily but they do also relish their occasional treat of fish and chips. Nursery children are also well catered for; they enjoy their adapted version of the school menu which is specially prepared for them by their own chef in a new kitchen adjacent to their classrooms. Nursery staff help and encourage their children very positively and successfully at lunch-times.
- 3.11 Regular exercise is an important feature of school life. Pupils not only have their physical education and games lessons in the very well-equipped senior school sports hall, but, in addition, they have a pleasant walk to and from the dining hall every lunch-time and, most importantly to them, they have ample space to enjoy physical activity at play-times. After-school sports clubs are also very popular.
- 3.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.13 The school's links with its parents are outstanding, and as a new school it is making excellent progress in establishing links with the community. The school very successfully fulfils its aim to foster good relationships and partnership between staff, pupils, parents and the wider community. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the education provided by the school and with their children's achievements. They were extremely pleased with progress, attainment and behaviour, the quality of teaching, the curriculum and the extra-curricular activities provided. The feeling amongst parents is that the school is true to its ethos. The school has an open-door policy and actively encourages contact between parents and staff. Form teachers are available at the beginning and end of each day when information can be shared with parents and minor difficulties can be addressed. Conversations between teachers and parents were seen to be friendly and relaxed. The headmaster and deputy head are also readily available and are high profile with their presence, which is much appreciated by parents. Communication between the school and the parents is regular and relevant. The weekly newsletter which is available on the school website ensures parents are kept well informed of school activities and achievements. A very attractive version for the Early Years Foundation Stage is also made available to parents whose children are in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- 3.14 The Parents' Association is a very active group which supports the school, raising valuable funds and giving parents another area in which to be involved. They organise events such as the firework party and the summer fete. The membership is drawn from all sections of the school community. The funds have paid for many initiatives and two examples of this are the playground equipment for the preparatory department and the violins for Year 3.
- 3.15 Parents are invited to attend many different events such as sports' matches, concerts and Visitation or Speech Day. They also are involved in many other activities such as listening to readers, helping with plays, making attractive and popular story sacks for the younger pupils and running the nearly-new uniform shop. Fathers can become involved on Dad's Day where they have already carried out tasks such as building the outdoor classroom and painting the playground boat.
- 3.16 The school is aware of its responsibilities to keep parents aware of policies and procedures relevant to them and their children. The annual *Information Booklet* for parents includes curriculum details and is very comprehensive; information relevant to the different age groups is also made available. All parents receive a copy of the well-presented and informative prospectus, as do parents of prospective pupils. Parents are well involved in the work and progress of their children. At the beginning of the autumn term, all parents are invited into the school for a curriculum meeting. Parents' evenings are held twice a year and reports are also sent out twice a year so that there is a spread of information. The reports are of a high quality and comment on the attainment and progress of pupils and how they can move forward.
- 3.17 The pre-school and after-school care facilities provided by the school are very helpful to many parents, who are also appreciative of the programme of after-school clubs and activities with which some give invaluable assistance.
- 3.18 The school tackles any anxieties which parents may have with care and consideration as soon as they are raised, and keeps a careful record of the concern and any actions taken.

- 3.19 The school is developing its links with the wider community. In particular, it is working on links with a local primary school to enhance the outdoor educational activities available to both schools. Pupils raise money for different charities, national and international, and this is an area where the four houses take pride in having responsibility for a project. They also take part in such campaigns as sending Christmas gift boxes to underprivileged children in different parts of the world.
- 3.20 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The preparatory school benefits from very supportive and effective governance. The board of governors, which also serves the senior school, is selected from the professional, business, academic and financial fields. The headmasters of both the senior and preparatory school attend governors' meetings and report to the academic sub-committee. The governors are in full agreement with the aims of the school and take their responsibilities very seriously; they are aware of and meet their statutory and regulatory obligations. Since the previous inspection, significant growth and improvement has taken place in the preparatory school which has responded to the high expectations of a governing body which fulfils its responsibilities very professionally.
- 4.2 Overall, members of the governing body, some of whom have strong links with the school, are very appropriately experienced and qualified. They accept the commitment involved in their appointment, including training, and, through the structure of their committees, make an important contribution to the success of the preparatory school and the fulfilment of its aims.
- 4.3 In the establishment of the preparatory school, the governors made a very serious financial commitment. They have made an ongoing investment of time, energy and funds in the provision of a junior school of high quality to complement the senior school and contribute positively to the quality of the overall education offered by Aldenham School.
- 4.4 One governor is appointed to have special responsibility for the preparatory school and this arrangement is taken very seriously. Governors are kept well informed about the preparatory school through the attached governor's visits and those of other governors, including the chairman. They also receive very full termly reports from the headmaster, information about targets achieved and an outline of the updated development plan for the preparatory school. Thus, they have a very effective oversight. The vision of the governors led to the creation of this new school and they are aware of its importance and its needs. They are committed to its continued educational development and further extension of its facilities as required.
- 4.5 Wise and far-sighted financial management overall, which the governors are determined to sustain, has ensured very pleasant facilities for teaching and learning, good staffing levels and generous resources, all of which support the good quality of education which is expected and provided. The recently redesigned and refurbished pre-preparatory department has provided accommodation and facilities of an excellent standard for the three to seven year old age group which matches those enjoyed by the seven to eleven year olds.
- 4.6 The headmaster and senior staff are well supported by the chairman, the chairmen of committees, the attached governor, and by the headmaster of the senior school. In addition to formal occasions and presentations, this very definite ongoing interest and involvement enables the community of governors and staff to work beneficially together. The governors were aware, for example, of the need to improve provision for gifted and talented pupils and have supported funding for this in addition to funding for pupils who require learning support, while their responsibilities for the welfare, health and safety of pupils are very effectively discharged. Pupils, parents and staff are appreciative of the extensive well-kept grounds and playing fields, the well-maintained buildings and facilities and the efficient administration of the school's affairs.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.7 The quality of leadership and management is highly effective. The school benefits greatly from supportive, encouraging and energetic leadership and management, extremely committed to, and successful in the fulfilment of, its aims and ethos. The very high quality of the provision in the pre-preparatory department and the Early Years Foundation Stage is a tribute to the dedicated leadership and management in that section of the school. The school has grown and developed very successfully since the previous inspection. The self-evaluation document, to which the whole staff contributed, illustrates well that the school is fully aware of its strengths and weaknesses and the distance it still has to travel to fulfil all its plans for the future. These plans include an increased emphasis on monitoring and peer observation of teaching, and the development of library provision. The school is making significant progress and is being very successfully led by the drive, energy and commitment to improvement and progress shown by the headmaster and those in management positions.
- 4.8 The headmaster of the preparatory school is assisted by a senior management team which consists of the deputy head, who is also the head of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and two curriculum co-ordinators. The headmaster is a member of the senior management team of the whole school. Relationships and the degree of co-operation between the two schools are excellent; the consistent approach to learning, teaching and administration is much to the benefit of the pupils of the preparatory school.
- 4.9 The preparatory school benefits from its very capable senior leadership and management in which the combined talents make a most significant contribution to the direction and quality of the education and care of the pupils. The very special ethos in the preparatory school reflects a commitment to establishing a warm and friendly environment combined with achieving the highest possible academic standards for each child. The positive, caring relationships and the importance placed on family values and the happiness of each child are also significant strengths.
- 4.10 The members of the senior management team are perceptive in their analysis of the needs of the school as a whole, and are determined to move forward. The development plan indicates excellent progress in their planning to meet priorities and the implementation of decisions. The formation of the current management team is comparatively recent and much updating of policies and procedures has taken place overall. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, very appropriate procedures and policies are supported by systems to check and review their effectiveness.
- 4.11 Thorough child protection and safe recruitment policies and procedures are firmly established. Recent appointments of well-qualified staff indicate selection arrangements which are effective and successful. The strengths of staff at all levels, teaching and non-teaching, are recognised and encouraged. Systems for performance management, including that of the headmaster, and identification of training needs to benefit the school and individuals are all correctly and effectively established. The school is exemplary in its generous support of the professional development of staff.
- 4.12 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers. There are no newly qualified teachers on the staff at present but arrangements for their induction and that of new members of staff are appropriate and of good quality.
- 4.13 Middle management is generally effective and has some outstandingly good features. Subject co-ordinators are becoming progressively more involved in processes for the evaluation of their subjects; schemes of work and subject handbooks are increasingly comprehensive. In the best, procedures for assessment, resource planning, monitoring of

teaching and peer observation are included, in addition to provision for pupils who require learning support or who are gifted and talented. A recent innovation allows subject coordinators time to audit thoroughly their curriculum area, including teaching, on a rolling programme basis, and funding is available for the area of focus.

- 4.14 Administrative staff are very efficient and suitably experienced for their specific roles. Finances are well managed and supervised. Reception office staff readily offer a warm welcome and kindly help to parents, pupils and visitors. Catering, maintenance, grounds and housekeeping staff all make their much appreciated contribution to the family atmosphere of this caring and friendly school.
- 4.15 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.16 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 Aldenham Preparatory School successfully accomplishes its mission to provide a happy, nurturing and warm environment where quality learning takes place and the needs of each individual child are fulfilled. The school gives an excellent start to children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and subsequently fulfils its aims outstandingly well as pupils proceed through the school to the end of Year 6. The good quality of the teaching and the whole educational experience inspires a love of learning and motivation to achieve the good academic standards which are being attained. The high standard of accommodation and resources, the beauty of the surroundings, the outstanding quality of display and the dedicated teaching all combine to provide rich and stimulating educational experiences for enquiring minds and to develop successfully abilities and talents over a wide spectrum. The school has very successfully nurtured an excellent awareness of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimension which underpins all its work and gives its pupils a quiet and natural courtesy and self-confidence and a thoughtfulness for other people. The high quality of the leadership and management, the supportive and effective governance, the excellent pastoral care, the very encouraging ethos and the outstanding partnership with parents all contribute to the fine quality of the education which pupils receive.
- 5.2 Since the previous inspection in 2002, the school has developed very successfully. The recommendations of the previous report have been met as the school has successfully grown year by year to take its place alongside the senior school as a successful preparatory school for three to eleven year olds and to fulfil the faith and vision of the governors. The school is aware of the areas for continued attention and realises that its present valuable monitoring programme is currently not extensive enough, and that pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to enjoy more experimental and investigative work or to use their new and still developing libraries. The last Ofsted nursery education report, of June 2008, made no recommendations for action.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no serious weaknesses; to enhance further the good quality of education it presently provides, the school should:
1. adjust the time allocation in the school day to give pupils greater opportunity to enjoy the challenge of experimental work in science, and of investigative work in general;
 2. extend its programme of monitoring and peer observation of teaching in order to disseminate the best practice, for example in the use of its assessment data, and in the interactive use of its electronic whiteboards;
 3. further develop the new libraries.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 24th to 27th November 2008. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. 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 Danice Iles	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Maria Edwards	Head of Junior Department, GSA school
Mrs Philippa Thompson	Former Head of Junior Department, GSA school