

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

INSPECTION OF

ST MARGARET'S SCHOOL, EXETER

by the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

on

9th to 12th October 2006

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

St Margaret's School, Exeter

Full Name of the School	St Margaret's School, Exeter
DfES Number	878/6002
Registered Charity Number	1103316
Address	147 Magdalen Road, Exeter EX2 4TS
Telephone Number	01392 273197
Fax Number	01392 251402
Email Address	headmistress@stmargarets-school.co.uk
Headmistress	Miss Rowan Edbrooke
Chairman of Governors	Professor John Bridge
Age Range	7-18
Gender	girls
Inspection Dates	9th-12th October 2006

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

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 St Margaret's School is a member of the Woodard Corporation. It aims to offer 'a stimulating and challenging academic education within a caring Christian environment. The school seeks to develop the potential of every girl, giving her the confidence to respond to the responsibilities and opportunities offered by society'.
- 1.2 The school is located near the centre of Exeter, close to the university and the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, in a series of connected nineteenth century houses, some of which are listed buildings. This part of Exeter is a conservation area. The school was founded in 1902 and historically had very close links with Exeter School, sharing many activities with this nearby boys' school.
- 1.3 Several major changes have occurred since the last inspection. Exeter School became co-educational in 2001 and St Margaret's has established its own extra-curricular music and drama activities, as well as the Combined Cadet Force (CCF). Sixth form teaching is no longer shared between the two schools. In 2001 the pre-prep section of the school was closed and the junior department now starts at Year 3. A new headmistress was appointed in 2004.
- 1.4 The school had 321 pupils on roll at the time of the inspection, aged from 7 to 18. The junior department has 51 pupils and the senior school 270, of whom 69 are in the sixth form. The ability range of the pupils on entry is broad; overall they are above average in ability, although several pupils at all stages, but particularly in the junior department, are of average or below average ability. If the pupils were performing in line with their abilities, results in national standardised tests and public examinations would be above the national average.
- 1.5 The pupils come from Exeter and the surrounding areas, from as far away as Okehampton, Honiton, Ashburton and Tiverton. They come from professional and farming families, and very few are from ethnic minorities
- 1.6 The school has identified 37 pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), none of whom has a statement of special educational need. One pupil has English as an additional language.
- 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 education provided meets the school's aim to offer 'a challenging and stimulating academic experience' that seeks to 'develop the potential of every girl', and does so with great success. Individual needs are accurately identified; pupils are treated as individuals and encouraged to do their best in all fields. The curriculum is based on, but not limited to, the National Curriculum, and provides a suitably broad and balanced framework for the pupils' learning. The last inspection report praised the wide choice of subjects at both GCSE and A level, and this remains a strength. The breadth of extra curricular activities on offer, in addition to the work-related learning curriculum, ensures that the pupils are well prepared to respond positively 'to the responsibilities and opportunities offered by society'.
- 2.2 The education pupils receive is well balanced and broad, offering opportunities to develop linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative skills. The provision of French in the junior department, and the opportunity to take separate sciences and two modern languages at GCSE, contribute positively to their educational experience. The creative curriculum, encompassing music, art and drama, is a particular strength of the school, making a strong contribution not only to creative skills but also to speaking and listening. Pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT) are satisfactory but are used very little outside ICT lessons.
- 2.3 Extra-curricular activities are a great strength. Pupils have the opportunity to join a wide variety of music, sport and drama clubs, and do so in substantial numbers. The school also provides a wide range of extremely well-supported outdoor activities, including one of very few all-girls' CCFs, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, and the chance to join the Ten Tors expeditions. Pupils from Years 6 to 10 take part in a local public speaking competition. Fundraising for both local and overseas charities gives chances for imaginative schemes and continuing relationships with charitable organisations, encouraging the pupils to make long term commitments. Voluntary service is an element of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme programme. The work experience programme in Year 11 follows GCSEs, and the school offers a range of placements provided by employers such as the Meteorological Office and the Environment Agency.
- 2.4 The Year 6 pupils are prepared well for joining the senior school, and being able to use the senior school library during that year, for example, contributes to a smooth transition. To ensure continuity of educational experience, all departments in the school are responsible for junior and senior pupils. Older pupils have good links with juniors through the house system, and a buddy scheme encourages good relations throughout the school. Careers education and guidance are good. They are incorporated into the personal, citizenship and careers education (PCCE) programme from Year 7 to 13, with industry days, the 'Real Game' and Young Enterprise all playing a part, alongside work experience. Year 10 and 11 pupils are thus well prepared for the choices to be made for the next stage of their education. Sixth form pupils express confidence in the advice and support offered in preparation for university applications. The PCCE programme was recently adapted to meet suggestions made by universities to enhance candidates' preparation for higher education.
- 2.5 Very good and detailed schemes of work are in use in all departments. The monthly teaching forum, with its aim of encouraging innovation and the spreading of good practice, has clearly already had good results in improving the educational experience within the classroom. Assessment information is used to help planning in all departments, with teachers showing

themselves very aware of individual needs. Setting in English, French and mathematics, some assignments targeted at differing abilities, and open-ended tasks in some subjects enable pupils to progress appropriately, though the most able are not always sufficiently challenged. The school is aware of this and the recent appointment of a teacher with responsibility for the more able has begun to improve this aspect of the educational experience.

- 2.6 A special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has also recently been appointed and each pupil with learning needs has a Student Support Profile (SSP). All teachers are aware of the advice contained in these and some excellent practice was seen. During the last few years, the school has focused strongly on teaching and learning with in-service training (INSET) targeted on teaching strategies to support and extend pupils. Individual support is given to the pupil with English as an additional language and other pupils with LDD receive individual help where appropriate.
- 2.7 The school meets its aims well. There are some weaknesses in the provision for the most academically able, but overall the provision is of a high standard. High participation rates, success in activities and very good examination results at all levels confirm this judgement.
- 2.8 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.9 The pupils achieve very well academically. At the last inspection, levels of attainment in the junior department were sometimes lower than might have been expected; this is no longer the case. At the end of Year 6, the pupils have the skills to move confidently to the next stage of their education. In lessons, and from the evidence of their books and files, pupils in all parts of the school achieve well in relation to their abilities. They perform, and achieve, at very high standards in extra-curricular activities.
- 2.10 The analysis of standardised tests in Years 3-6 shows that pupils make sound progress in maths and good progress in English and science. Over the most recent three years for which comparative data is available, GCSE results have been good for their abilities, since they have been well above the national average for all maintained secondary schools, and in modern foreign languages, have been far above. This continues the pattern seen at the last inspection, when they were comparable with 'those of pupils at selective schools'. At A-level, pupils' results are above the national average for all pupils taking A-level, and appropriate to their abilities. In the creative subjects, sociology and German, results are well above the national average, but results in physics have been below the school and national averages over the last three years.
- 2.11 Pupils throughout the school are well grounded in the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the subjects taught. Their achievement, as seen in written work and lessons, is predominantly good; they can apply previously acquired knowledge and skills to new work, and show both practical and creative abilities. When encouraged to think critically and imaginatively, they do so very well. Achievement in art, drama and music is excellent. Pupils with specific learning difficulties show particularly good achievement, in work and in examination results.
- 2.12 Achievement in extra-curricular activities is outstanding. Fifteen pupils currently play in district, county or regional level teams. Over half the pupils eligible to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme do so, and 24 are currently working towards the gold award. The CCF is exceptionally strong and two cadets have been selected for national recognition,

one as the standard bearer at the Royal Albert Hall annual Remembrance Day service, and the other as the Lord Lieutenant's Cadet. Musically, all the school's orchestras, chamber groups and choirs are very strong. The chapel choir has won an Outstanding Performance Award in the National Festival of Music for the last five years, and twice reached the semi-final of the BBC Radio 3 'Choir of the Year' competition.

- 2.13 Pupils work hard and have well-developed skills. They are motivated and enthusiastic; a Year 8 pupil said, 'Learning is fun'. When working in groups, it was noticeable throughout the school that conversation was confined to the subject they were supposed to be discussing, and the pupils' work ethic in all their activities is excellent. They show concentration and enjoyment during lessons. They are well organised and settle to work promptly.
- 2.14 Pupils are very articulate. They speak confidently and also listen carefully and responsively to each other and to their teachers. Younger pupils, in both the junior and senior parts of the school, read clearly and intelligently. Some good extended writing was seen in all age groups, but there are still too many syllabus-bound exercises which do not afford opportunities to the pupils to develop their ideas in writing. In many lessons, pupils demonstrated effective application of mathematical concepts, but relatively little was seen either in books or lessons of the use of skills in ICT. All the pupils interviewed were clearly able to think and reason for themselves, although the lesson structure in some cases meant that there was less evidence of this in the classroom.
- 2.15 A variety of note taking skills are used by pupils throughout the school; books and files are neatly kept and well organised. Jotters show evidence of sensible and appropriate use. Pupils co-operate well in all subjects, and whether they are working individually, in pairs or in groups, they also co-operate very well with their teachers. Perseverance in all school activities was marked, with full attendance at practices and rehearsals. Commitment to all aspects of school life is a strong factor in the high level of achievement.
- 2.16 The attitudes and skills inculcated at the school certainly prepare pupils for the 'opportunities and responsibilities' of their later life, as the school aims to do, and produce confident, articulate and accomplished young women.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.17 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding throughout the school, as it was at the last inspection. Provision for the pupils' personal development is a major strength of the school and underpins its ethos. Across a wide range of activities the pupils display confidence, modesty, integrity and a true sense of self-worth.
- 2.18 The school provides very well for the spiritual needs of the pupils. Assemblies reflect the Christian ethos of the school, as do the links with local churches. Christian Union groups meet regularly. The chapel is used for discussion and clubs, and the school chaplain's contribution to the spiritual life of the school is greatly appreciated. At the same time, pupils are encouraged in their own beliefs and observance, and some excellent discussion in Religious Studies (RS) lessons on the differing Christian approaches to abortion enabled them to develop their own views. Other faiths are respected and Muslim pupils have use of a prayer room. Pupils' self-confidence arises from the multitude of opportunities available, through the chance to work co-operatively and due to the many initiatives offering leadership experience.
- 2.19 The pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong and display a deep moral sense of responsibility, reinforced through assemblies, circle time, tutor groups and the PCCE

programme. Even when away from direct adult supervision, pupils of all ages have the self-discipline to behave in exemplary fashion. Staff act as good role models and the trust shown by them is appreciated; the pupils respond with considerable maturity and responsibility. New pupils of any age are immediately made to feel welcome and the pupils are extremely supportive of each other, not only within peer groups but across age groups. An atmosphere of tolerance and respect for the needs of others prevails.

- 2.20 The pupils have good social awareness, take responsibility for their own behaviour, and contribute to school life with enthusiasm. Praise is given liberally for their achievements and they value the house point system. The widespread, genuine concern for the school environment is shown by pupils' support for the recycling initiative. There is no litter anywhere and the classrooms are kept very tidy.
- 2.21 A detailed PCCE programme incorporates the study of public institutions and services and ensures pupils are informed of social issues beyond school. Charitable work is significant. Pupils develop culturally through a rich variety of cultural experiences delivered and embedded in the curriculum of most subjects, but particularly in music, drama and art. Opportunities exist at all stages of schooling for pupils to learn about and experience different cultures through an extensive programme of trips locally and overseas.
- 2.22 The school's outstanding success in promoting pupils' personal development is epitomised by the helpfulness and courtesy of pupils, by their desire to please their teachers and by the obvious rapport and respect that exists between staff and pupil. Life skills are central to the all-round educational experience and enable the pupils to leave as individuals confident to face the world beyond school.
- 2.23 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.24 Much of the teaching is good, especially in the junior department, where it has improved markedly since the last inspection. In the senior school, teaching was considered a strength at the last inspection, but there are too many lessons where the pace is slow and pupils are not sufficiently challenged intellectually, or encouraged to take risks. The last inspection report recommended that more should be done to challenge the most able; a first step has been taken towards this, but more needs to be done. Assessment and recording were inconsistent at the last inspection but are now rigorous and thorough. The teaching enables most pupils to achieve well in both academic work and extra-curricular activities.
- 2.25 Teaching which fosters pupils' creative and physical development is very good; the arts in particular are a real strength of the school. Careful, thorough teaching with an emphasis on individual needs brings good results. In lessons where the teaching was challenging as well as encouraging, where pupils could tackle open-ended questions, the results were excellent. In some cases, though, intellectual rigour was not encouraged, particularly in classes preparing for public examinations. Pupils were taught from commercially produced workbooks which closely followed examination board specifications, and questioning focused on lower order thinking skills rather than analysis or evaluation. Despite this caveat, it was clear that the pupils remained interested in their work.
- 2.26 Teaching is usually well planned and some very interesting and effective teaching methods were seen, such as the deliberate use of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning tactics in RS

- and English lessons. Some lessons are so tightly planned that little scope remains to discuss, or move beyond the confines of the syllabus. Occasionally the pace of lessons is too slow, but usually time is well used and, for instance, enough time is allowed for the setting and explaining of homework.
- 2.27 Teachers have an extensive range of data about the pupils' abilities, as well as copies of their SSPs, and these are used effectively to tailor tasks to the individual when appropriate. They know their pupils and their strengths and weaknesses very well, and individual attention in lessons means that no-one is left behind.
- 2.28 All teachers have the appropriate knowledge and understanding of their subjects, equipping them to move beyond the sometimes restrictive embrace of a rigid framework. In the best lessons, teachers demonstrated depth of knowledge in discussion, and the associated ability to extend the pupils' horizons and improve their learning. However, where note-taking from the board or handouts were the main strategies used in senior school lessons, teachers lost opportunities to give the pupils the benefit of their wider understanding, and lessons were not challenging enough for the more able.
- 2.29 Teaching resources are adequate, and some departments with limited facilities, such as physical education (PE) make excellent use of what they have. The school now has very good rooms for the teaching of ICT in both the junior department and the senior school, but is not yet making good use of them. Some teachers use the facilities with their classes but still mainly for presentation or reinforcement of earlier work rather than research or development. Newly installed interactive white boards are not all being used effectively.
- 2.30 Pupils' work is assessed regularly and thoroughly. The school assessment policy contains good clear guidance on the purpose of marking and procedures to make it effective. This is followed by teachers, who also write careful comments offering praise, encouragement and advice. Departments use a variety of criteria and grades, which are clearly understood by the pupils. Many departments have details of the criteria printed and pasted in exercise books, which makes it very clear to pupils what they have to do to make progress. Teachers make this explicit, and use the information well when planning lessons.
- 2.31 Teaching encourages the pupils to behave responsibly. Teachers' expectations of behaviour, commitment and effort are high, and the pupils meet these well, responding to the obvious care and concern shown for them, and the example set by their teachers. One pupil said of her netball team that the teacher was their inspiration.
- 2.32 The school has very thorough procedures for evaluation. They use objective measures of attainment at Year 3 and at later entry in the junior department, at Years 7, 9 and 12 in the senior school, as well as analysing public examination results in the light of all the available data. The information from these is shared with all staff and with older pupils, who are aware of their target grades. Pupil self-evaluation based on public examination marking criteria is also encouraged.
- 2.33 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 was judged to be excellent at the last inspection and it has remained so. The school aims to offer a caring Christian environment and it does this extremely well. The staff provide very effective support and guidance for all pupils and care for their welfare, health and safety is also outstanding. Two recommendations from the last inspection – to ‘make health and safety issues an agenda item for staff meetings’, and ‘carry out the first fire practice of the academic year in the first week of term’ – have both been carried out.
- 3.2 The school’s pastoral, tutorial and other support systems make an extremely positive and highly effective contribution to the academic standards and personal growth achieved by the pupils. Form tutors and key stage co-ordinators have a detailed knowledge of the pupils in their care, and the staff responsible for extra-curricular activities make an important contribution. Documentation is very thorough, with academic monitoring and pastoral support systems being carefully interwoven. Departmental meeting agendas include reference to any pupils giving cause for concern.
- 3.3 Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Teachers not only know their pupils very well, but make every effort to support and encourage them inside and outside the classroom. The pupils all praised their teachers for their hard work in helping them to achieve. They also commented that the discipline of activities such as the CCF or choir, spilled over into the rest of school life. So, too, do the leadership skills acquired through these activities. Numbers of senior pupils hold posts of responsibility; an informal sense of responsibility for others is clearly evident, for instance at lunchtime when older pupils sit and chat with younger ones.
- 3.4 Measures to promote good discipline, including an anti-bullying policy, are very successful. Much more important in the promotion of good discipline are the high expectations of teachers and the development of self-discipline among the pupils. Norms of courtesy and consideration for others are so deeply ingrained that it is rare for recourse to be made to formal disciplinary measures.
- 3.5 Child protection policies are in place and are fully complied with. The headmistress is the designated child protection officer and training in child protection is given to all staff at the recommended intervals.
- 3.6 All measures necessary to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken. The recording of fire drills is punctilious and a fire safety risk assessment is regularly reviewed by the head of maintenance. The school’s health and safety policy is comprehensive and very well managed. Each department has a risk assessment procedure which is regularly reviewed by the bursar and head of maintenance. The school has adopted an amended version of the local authority’s trips policy, and risk assessments are scrupulously compiled.
- 3.7 The school’s concern for the health of the pupils is exemplary. The school matron is available to pupils all day and six staff have completed an advanced first aid training course. The school’s approach to nutrition is a shining example of good practice. School lunches are varied, healthy and delicious; although pupils in Year 9 and above may bring packed lunches, very few choose to do so. Those who bring packed lunches eat in the dining room with the rest of the school, and a check is made daily to ensure that all pupils do eat lunch. Pupils of different ages, and teachers, sit and chat informally over their meal. The school’s nutrition

action group works with the home economics department and the school caterer on the nutritional content of the food, so that a particularly delicious chocolate and coconut flapjack has had its fat and sugar content reduced without losing its flavour. Fresh fruit, salads and a variety of cooked vegetables are always available. Chips are a fortnightly treat. A 'green' vending machine sells only healthy products, some of them organic.

- 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 The school aims to listen to and respond to parents and for the last two years has carried out a parental questionnaire. It encourages communication at all levels and parents are happy that they have opportunities to be involved in the life of the school and that their concerns are dealt with properly. The school has a very effective partnership with parents and very good links with the wider community, as was the case at the last inspection.
- 3.10 In reply to the parents' questionnaire completed for the inspection almost all parents were satisfied or very satisfied with the education and support their daughters receive – 'a privilege to attend such a school' was the comment of one parent. A small minority thought too much homework was set but this was counterbalanced by the number who said that not enough homework was expected.
- 3.11 Parents are encouraged to become involved in school activities. The parents' association arranges occasions such as a welcome evening for new parents and staff, and fund raising occasions like quiz nights. The money raised buys extra equipment for the school. Parents also volunteer to run the second-hand clothing store. They have good opportunities to become involved with pupils' education through help with sport, drama productions, and adventure training. Parents who help on a voluntary basis are checked through the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB).
- 3.12 The school has an open door policy and parents are welcome to talk to the headmistress or other members of staff if they have concerns about the work or progress of their daughters. Contact books (in the senior school) and message books (in the junior department) provide a simple and effective means of communication between home and school.
- 3.13 Parents are provided with good regular information about the school. Very detailed and informative handbooks are sent to new parents and these contain all the statutory information along with much more. Options booklets are issued to pupils in Years 9 and 11. The school's website and newsletter give notice of coming events. Parents also receive plenty of information about their daughters' work and progress. The junior department issues a very useful 'curriculum focus' which explains clearly the topics to be covered in the year ahead. Parents' information evenings are held as required and the school organises talks on subjects of concern for parents, such as drugs. Open evenings are held regularly.
- 3.14 Concerns raised by parents are dealt with informally if possible. However, the school has a formal complaints procedure which meets the statutory requirements and details are in the parents' handbook. Detailed records are kept of complaints.
- 3.15 Detailed and thorough reports are made to parents, and attainment grades are standardised across the school. Reports are complemented by comments on ability and targets for improvement, which show how well the staff know the pupils. Interim assessments give parents a snapshot of achievement and effort between reports.

- 3.16 The school promotes very positive links with the wider community. Locally, the school has partnership links with a nearby primary school, St Sidwell's. St Margaret's teams play matches against local schools and take part in the Ten Tors expedition. Visits take place within Exeter to places as varied as the Cathedral and Sainsbury's. Further afield, foreign language exchanges, trips to First World War battlefields, and cultural visits are all well supported. The school has developed strong links with Europe through the Comenius Project, which links schools from Belgium, Denmark, Poland and the United Kingdom. For many years the school has supported the Goodwill Village in India, both by fundraising and also by making it the focus of the biennial Duke of Edinburgh's gold award expedition.
- 3.17 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 structure and management arrangements related to the governing body (known at St Margaret's as the Council) are well defined and support effective oversight of the school. The Council also receives advice and support from the Woodard Corporation, which increases its effectiveness and brings a wider educational perspective to the governors' deliberations.
- 4.2 Members of Council sit on school committees such as the ICT, health and safety and Christian ethos committees, and are linked to specific departments in the school, which enables good oversight of the running of the school. The Council strongly supports the Christian ethos of the school. Its members are firmly based in the locality which contributes to their clear insight into the nature of the school and its future direction, and its members have a wide and appropriate range of expertise. The council is an important contributory factor to the success of the school in meeting its aims.
- 4.3 Members of the Council are very aware of their responsibilities and have been closely involved in forward planning, financial control and the educational direction of the school. The development plan was due for review in the summer; this has been postponed until November 2006 because of pressure of business. The Council is aware that the plan needs more objective criteria and intermediate targets.
- 4.4 The headmistress and her staff speak highly of the support and knowledge of the Council. Members are regular visitors to the school, not only for school functions but to observe lessons in the junior department. They know the school well, regularly inviting heads of department to talk about, and respond to questions on, the work of their departments. They also know the staff, who appreciate their concern at times of bereavement, for example.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The headmistress provides strong leadership and she is supported by a strong management team, whose roles have been clearly defined in response to the last inspection report. The school's self-evaluation shows that they are aware of the areas of improvement needed in the school and that a start has been made.
- 4.6 The staff greatly appreciate the approachability of the headmistress and her team and the support they receive from the leadership of the school. Clear educational direction is reflected in the high standards of the education provided, the care of the pupils and the success of the school in fulfilling its aims, but more focus on monitoring teaching is needed. The development plan is still more of an outline than a worked out strategy, and it needs more input from the rest of the staff, but its direction is clear and so are its priorities. Planning how to make the best use of the ICT suite needs immediate attention.
- 4.7 The staff handbook contains a wealth of policies and procedures which are followed by the staff. Monitoring takes place in some areas, for instance heads of departments check mark books and exercise books for compliance with the assessment and teaching policies, and lesson observations take place regularly in most departments.
- 4.8 The teaching and non-teaching staff are loyal, committed and hardworking, and this is equally true of the longest serving staff and the newest recruits. The reception, catering and

maintenance staff, led by the bursar, enjoy their work and feel they have both sufficient responsibility and support where necessary. Teaching staff enjoy their work and speak very highly of their pupils and appreciate having such a pleasant environment in which to work. All staff feel valued, and the school continues to reflect the qualities which were recognised in the award of Investors in People status.

- 4.9 Financial control is stringent. Day to day spending is carefully monitored to ensure that departments stay within budget. Resources are well managed to provide the equipment needed for the pupils' teaching and learning, and improvements to the accommodation are carried out regularly; the junior library has just been re-housed so that it is at the centre of the building. Day to day administration is very efficient. For reasons outside the school's control, electricity was cut off to part of the school during the inspectors' visit, and alternative arrangements for the afternoon lessons were made quickly and communicated efficiently.
- 4.10 Since the last inspection, and in response to the recommendations, there has been a considerable improvement in management. The junior department is now clearly under the control of the head of the department, who is a member of the senior management team. Roles within the leadership group have clear job descriptions and have freed the headmistress from sole responsibility for the curriculum – a key recommendation of the last inspection report. The school decided not to appoint a director of studies, as recommended, but the different aspects of that role are carried out by the curriculum committee, the key stage co-ordinators, and the assessment co-ordinator.
- 4.11 Appropriate checks on all new staff, including references, confirmation of qualifications and CRB procedures are meticulously carried out. All longer-serving staff have been checked with the Department of Education and List 99. The programme for the induction of newly qualified teachers is good, as is the internal induction process for newly appointed staff, who have regular, timetabled, formal and informal meetings with senior staff throughout their first term.
- 4.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.13 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 St Margaret's aims to provide a stimulating and challenging academic education. It provides a broad and balanced academic education, which at its best is stimulating and challenging for all pupils. It does not always meet this aim for the most able, nor is the teaching sufficiently stimulating in parts of the senior school. ICT is not used to best effect to achieve the school's aim. It aims to offer this education within a caring Christian environment. St Margaret's succeeds extremely well in doing this; the environment is not simply Christian, although that is an important aspect of life at the school, nor is it simply caring, although the care given is excellent. The school is a community permeated by Christian principles. It is outstandingly successful in embodying these core values in the highest standards of care and support shown to all its members
- 5.2 The school also aims to develop the potential of every girl. Here again, the school rises to this challenge, with its wide variety of subjects and extra-curricular activities on offer, and a pastoral care system which focuses on the individual. As one pupil said, 'your skills and qualities are as important here as your academic achievements'. This gives her the confidence to respond to the responsibilities and opportunities offered by society. The school encourages pupils to take responsibility and practise leadership, and they grow into young women who are equipped with the life skills to fulfil this aim, to seize opportunities to broaden their educational experiences and to excel.
- 5.3 The school has greatly improved since the last inspection. Almost all the major and minor recommendations have been acted on successfully; the school markets itself widely, has improved the accommodation for science and home economics, greatly improved the standard of teaching in the junior department, and has brought in a new system of assessment and recording. Improvements to the management structure have been detailed in paragraph 4.9.
- 5.4 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.5 In order to take the school further forward the school should consider the following:
1. identify and disseminate best practice in teaching across all departments, to encourage intellectual risk taking and challenge, and to provide greater opportunities for independent learning;
 2. raise the teachers' confidence and expertise in ICT, enabling them to make more effective use of the school's ICT facilities to enhance pupils' learning.
- 5.6 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 9th to 12th October 2006. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the medical room. 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

A M Sutcliffe	Reporting Inspector
Z Axton	Deputy Head, GSA school
M Burridge	Former Head, GSA junior school
H Crawford	Deputy Head, SHMIS school
L Cole	Deputy Head, GSA school
U Stevens	Deputy Head, GSA school
M Watson	Head, HMC and SHMIS junior school