

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Epsom College

Full Name of the School	Epsom College
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Registered Charity Number	312046
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Age Range	13 to 18
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	5th to 8th May 2009

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, May 2007 and February 2009.

The inspection was not carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate, and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the college in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the college or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the college'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 college, its services or other physical features.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the College

- 1.1 The college opened in 1855 as the Royal Medical Benevolent College and was later named Epsom College. It is a Christian foundation, operating as a charitable company limited by guarantee and governed by a board of trustees, and it welcomes pupils from a diverse range of faiths and cultures. Situated on a parkland site close to south-west London it is accommodated in Victorian buildings, adapted to modern use and supplemented by many later additions to boarding and teaching areas. It is organised as twelve houses for day and boarding pupils. Some pupils are day boarders and others weekly and full boarders. The houses are constituted as day or boarding, with some day pupils in boarding houses.
- 1.2 The college aims to provide exceptional all-round opportunities – academic, social, sporting and cultural – in a safe and supportive community. It seeks to develop the pupils’ talents and to broaden their interests so that they become confident and tolerant young people. It sets out to achieve a stimulating curriculum, a wide range of extra-curricular activities, high moral and spiritual values, a sense of responsibility, comprehensive pastoral care and links with local and international communities. A distinctive aim is to preserve and strengthen close traditional links to medicine. The college prides itself on its close contact with parents. Its boarding aims are complementary: to develop talents, academic, athletic and cultural, in a happy, friendly and purposeful atmosphere conducive to a high moral code and respect towards others.
- 1.3 Since the last inspection in 2003, the college has increased the proportion of girl pupils and refurbished its science and mathematics accommodation. It has developed new drama and dance studios, a new fitness suite, and a new day house for girls. Other changes have included improved and well-appointed facilities for art, information and communication technology (ICT), the sixth form and boys’ boarding. The length of lessons has been increased to 50 minutes, and pastoral, academic and management changes have been introduced.
- 1.4 The total number of pupils is 718, of whom 462 are boys and 256 girls. Two hundred and eighty-six pupils (190 boys and 96 girls) are full or weekly boarders. The number of sixth formers is 313 (198 boys and 115 girls). Altogether 64 pupils have a mother tongue other than English and of these 36 receive support from the college. The college has identified 132 pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, 67 of whom receive specialist learning support. Very few have individual education plans and none has a statement of special educational needs. The pupils come largely from business and professional families. Eight out of ten pupils live within a 25-mile radius of the college and one in ten is from overseas, mainly from China and Malaysia.
- 1.5 For entry to Year 9, the requirements are either a satisfactory school reference and a suitable standard in the Common Entrance examination or success in the college entrance examination, consisting of an informal interview and tests in English, mathematics and verbal reasoning. Entry to Year 12 depends on an interview, cognitive ability tests and GCSE examinations. Applicants whose first language is not English are tested on their proficiency in English.
- 1.6 Standardised tests show that the ability profile of the college is well above the national average in Years 9 to 11. The proportion of pupils of average ability is about one in ten and two-thirds are at least well above average. If pupils were to perform in line with their abilities, their results in GCSE examinations would be well above the average for all maintained secondary schools, but below the average for maintained selective schools.

Ability in the sixth form is above the average for A-level candidates nationally. If the pupils were to perform in line with their abilities, they would attain results above the national average for all maintained schools but below those for maintained selective schools.

- 1.7 Few pupils leave the college at the end of Year 11, and in recent years from 23 to 35 pupils have joined Year 12. Half of these have come from overseas and most of the remainder from London independent day schools. On leaving at the end of Year 13, most pupils proceed to well-known universities and colleges, including medical schools.
- 1.8 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the college. The year group nomenclature used by the college and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following tables.

College	NC name
Middle 4	Year 9
Upper 4	Year 10
Fifth Form	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The college is successful in providing a broadly based education, as at the time of the last inspection, and in furthering its ambitious aim to provide exceptional all-round opportunities, academic, sporting and cultural, together with a stimulating curriculum and an extensive extra-curricular programme. The increased length of lessons to 50 minutes has had a positive effect on the curriculum and reduced movement across the site. Pupils are offered a wide range of subjects at GCSE and A level, although there is some inequality of opportunity for pupils in Year 9, as the school is aware.
- 2.2 The provision of separate sciences, French, Spanish, German and Latin are strengths of the curriculum. For the skills of communication, English, drama, history and modern foreign languages are particularly important in fostering the pupils' ability to express themselves orally and in writing. Various subjects, including science and music, promote pupils' use of appropriate technical vocabulary. Subjects beyond mathematics, such as science and geography, help to establish numeracy skills. Additional opportunities in mathematics are provided for the most able, who sit their International GCSE examination early in Year 11. Approximately half of all pupils take instrumental music lessons. The creative work carried out in the drama, art, and design and technology departments contributes to the pupil's aesthetic and cultural development. The wide range of sporting activities enables all pupils to develop their physical skills in the major team games and in others such as squash and badminton or through the use of the fitness suite. Business opportunities are available through the Young Enterprise scheme and a group selling 'fair trade' goods.
- 2.3 The college is rightly proud of its superb opportunities for extra-curricular activities. These experiences greatly enrich the curriculum. An extremely wide variety is offered and pupils are expected to participate in a number of different activities during the course of each year. Music is prominent, with choirs, orchestra and ensembles. Other activities observed during the inspection included ballet, pottery, creative textiles, swimming, an orchestral/ensemble concert and a school speaking competition for Years 9 and 10, valuable in cultivating confidence and skills of presentation. The combined cadet force (CCF), compulsory in Years 10 and 11 and optional thereafter, does much to promote team work and offers a wide variety of activities including camping, field cooking, sailing, water survival and close combat training. First-class provision is made for the most talented and able in sport and many opportunities are also provided for the less talented.
- 2.4 The house experience makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE), although PSHE is taught as a discrete subject only to pupils in Years 9 and 10. Many pupils in Year 11 undertake an optional period of work experience after their GCSE examinations. Former pupils and governors are able to offer suitable placements, although pupils are encouraged to organise their own. Sixth-form pupils take part in voluntary service, such as visiting the elderly, fundraising and assisting riding for those with disabilities.
- 2.5 Pupils throughout the college benefit from sound advice provided by the careers department. Year 9 pupils receive guidance on subject choices for GCSE, and Year 11 pupils are helped in their choice of A-level options. Several excellent guidance documents are issued, including the pupils' handbook and the booklets providing information on GCSE options and the sixth form. Pupils in Year 12 are given advice on applying to university, including interview technique, and also on the world of work beyond university. A series of

workshops and talks on a wide range of careers is also offered, drawing on the experiences of parents, past pupils and governors.

- 2.6 For the most part, the curriculum is suitably planned and pupils can choose subjects from a wide range, but not all pupils have equal opportunities. In Year 9, pupils who take Latin have half the number of music and design and technology lessons available to those pupils who do not take Latin. Pupils who enter Year 9 having already studied Spanish are taught in a discrete group, enabling them to make rapid progress; but when these pupils move into Year 10 they are no longer taught as one accelerated group, and are placed in mixed ability groups, which slows their progress. Pupils in Years 11, 12 and 13 do not have any taught PSHE lessons.
- 2.7 Pupils with learning difficulties are well served by the learning support department. They receive help with their individual difficulties and support for their approach to regular learning. Careful assessment and screening enables help to be provided in behaviour management and a variety of needs. Support for those with English as an additional language is also highly effective.
- 2.8 The college meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.9 Pupils' learning and achievements are strong. The college is successful in its aim to challenge its pupils to develop their talents and to maximise the individual potential of each pupil. Since the last inspection, the college has maintained a high level of academic results.
- 2.10 Pupils have a broad and secure knowledge of the subjects they study. They confidently use mathematical skills in other subjects; for example, in science. Pupils demonstrate the ability to think and act critically and creatively in subjects such as religious studies and English. However, in some areas of the curriculum, too close an adherence to the requirements of examination specifications has limited the opportunity for independent thought. The college encourages able pupils to study for additional qualifications in critical thinking and the A-level extended project. There is some well-conceived use of ICT, as exemplified in sixth-form design and technology and in Year 9 First World War projects, but effective use of ICT beyond word processing is not widely exploited across all departments. Pupils demonstrate very good technical and practical knowledge and skill, seen in the quality of the art on display and the excellent understanding of materials in design and technology lessons. Accomplished theatrical skills were observed in a visually spectacular Year 12 drama production. Pupils are confident and articulate in English and sixth-form modern languages. Written work demonstrates high-order vocabulary, good structure and, in the sixth form, evidence of extensive research.
- 2.11 Pupils who study English as an additional language demonstrate high levels of oral competence and were seen to deploy advanced vocabulary and judicious irony. Pupils with learning difficulties successfully overcome their difficulties and engage fully with the mainstream curriculum.
- 2.12 Pupils' attainment at age sixteen is very good in relation to their abilities. Results in GCSE over the three years to 2007 have been far above the national average for all maintained schools and higher than those for maintained selective schools. National comparisons are not available for 2008, but the college results were similar to those obtained in previous years, with two-thirds of all pupils gaining A* and A grades.

- 2.13 Pupils' attainment at age eighteen has also been very good in relation to their abilities. Their performance in A-level examinations has been well above the national average for all maintained schools and above that for maintained selective schools. National comparisons are not available for 2008, but the college results were similar to those for previous years, with eight out of ten pupils gaining grades A and B.
- 2.14 Outstanding achievements occur in a wide range of academic and extra-curricular areas. Individual achievements have included success in a national economics competition, a national design and technology scholarship, and a gold award in the national physics Olympiad. At national level, individual sporting distinctions have involved playing rugby for England, representing Great Britain in the fencing cadet squad, playing golf for the Welsh schoolboys team, and being a member of the England under eighteen golf training squad. The first eleven hockey team reached the final of the county cup. Pupils are successful in music examinations and several have achieved distinctions at various levels, including grade 8. Reflecting the extensive range of CCF activities, the college team successfully retained its title as national champions in indoor rifle shooting, for the fifth time, and has been notably successful in outdoor shooting also. County honours have been won in the major and other sports. College magazines, which pupils edit or assist in editing, are notable for their quality of content and presentation.
- 2.15 At their best, pupils are excellent at taking the initiative in making notes. Files of written work are often logically and sequentially organised but are sometimes unhelpfully arranged. Pupils are highly co-operative in their learning and often work well together in groups to discuss and develop their ideas. An intrinsically strong, disciplined atmosphere is apparent in many classes; pupils settle quickly to their work and apply themselves extremely well. On occasion, discussion shows evident enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.16 The quality of the pupils' personal development is outstanding, and meets the stated aim of the college to challenge pupils to become confident and tolerant young people, with a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to the community, and a clear moral and spiritual awareness. The last inspection report commented on the pupils' helpfulness, courtesy and conduct, and judged personal development to be very good as a result of the college's provision. These elements are now an even stronger feature.
- 2.17 The development of spiritual awareness amongst the pupils is extremely good. Respect shown for each other by members of the college community is a notable feature of the atmosphere of the college, whilst understanding and sympathy with the feelings of others are cornerstones of the college ethos. Within the curriculum, in boarding and in activities throughout the college, pupils show knowledge and insight into values and beliefs, and their spiritual awareness and self-knowledge are conspicuous. They are confident, caring and self-aware. These qualities are promoted by regular assemblies in the elegant chapel, which acts as a focus for Christian witness throughout the college. These gatherings offer a calm, focused and spiritual start to the day, where broader issues are covered and a sense of community is fostered. Other faiths have their own times of religious observance during the week, and Muslims, Jews and Hindus take part in chapel worship on occasions such as Holocaust Memorial Day, thus gaining a strong sense of being part of the whole.
- 2.18 Pupils have a strong moral sense and a clear awareness of what is right and wrong. They are considerate and polite. When they meet visitors to the college, they are relaxed, confident and helpful; they frequently speak most favourably about 'their' college, describing as fair the way it deals with negative incidents. Pupils show respect for the college, its facilities and its environment.

- 2.19 The pupils' social development is outstanding. They relate positively to one another as they participate in the life of the community. They demonstrate a spirit of co-operation in boarding, in teams and in groups working together in physical education, the CCF, drama and music. Their personal development thrives through boarding house life, house competitions and posts of responsibility at all levels, whether as prefects or in extra-curricular activities. Their knowledge of current affairs is developed in Year 9 PSHE lessons, and there are annual trips to the Houses of Parliament in the younger years. In Year 10, PSHE lessons cover the way in which the law and government work. Relationships amongst pupils, regardless of age, and between pupils and teachers are very good; within house life they are exceptional.
- 2.20 The pupils' cultural development is notable. They appreciate their own Western European culture in art, music, literature and history, and they are well aware of other cultural traditions. Pupils from abroad state that they have no difficulty in becoming part of the wider college community, and cultural festivals are investigated in various lessons throughout the year. A boarders' committee meets to organise celebrations of their own particular traditional festivals, which are then enjoyed by others across the school, regardless of their cultural backgrounds.
- 2.21 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.22 Teaching is effective, as at the time of the last inspection, with occasional outstanding features and a small number of less than satisfactory lessons. It is successful in promoting the college aim to develop pupils' talents and to prepare them for entry to university. However, some unevenness known to the college is apparent in the quality of marking and reporting.
- 2.23 Teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make measurable progress. Excellent provision is made for pupils with English as an additional language: in some classes, the teacher's lesson plans specifically provide for these pupils and for those with learning difficulties. In some subjects, the most able pupils are fully stretched: for example, in classes where AS or A-level work is used in pre-GCSE classes. Year 12 pupils are encouraged to write an A-level extended project. The academically gifted are identified by the college but teaching does not always take their needs into account by routinely stretching them beyond examination requirements.
- 2.24 The most successful lessons show a strong sense of purpose, and are based on careful planning and variety of method. Prominent features include clear time management, effective questioning and consideration for the needs of individuals. Above all, mastery of the material and lively enthusiasm are the hallmarks of quality. In lessons generally, teachers expect pupils to think for themselves and to apply themselves intellectually and creatively. Teachers know their pupils well and have a high expectation of good classroom behaviour. This encourages pupils to be respectful of others' contributions and efforts.
- 2.25 Lessons are usually well planned and teaching methods are sometimes effectively varied to help pupils to make progress on a difficult topic. However, a few lessons were not sufficiently well planned to offer variety or challenge, or were dominated by the teacher to the extent that the pupils had little opportunity to contribute, and the result was a merely dutiful response.

- 2.26 Teachers are aware of their pupils' aptitudes and academic needs and usually cater for them, but this awareness does not always ensure that work is tailored to individual needs in class and homework assignments. Teachers are well qualified and most have excellent subject knowledge. They make well-chosen use of the helpful facilities available, some of which are of high quality, notably in history and geography. They exploit the potential of the very well-equipped facilities in science, design and technology and drama. In some subjects, the pupils make effective use of the resources of the library, and sixth formers use it productively for research, but borrowing figures are low. To counter this, the library takes initiative in promoting reading; an example was 'a blind date with a book' on Valentine's Day. The college is well provided with ICT resources and good use is made of them for college-wide communication. Teachers make use of ICT in their teaching, and highly effective use was occasionally observed, notably in science, but it is not widely exploited to provide variation in teaching methodology.
- 2.27 The assessment of pupils' work varies in quality. Good practice was noted in different subjects, such as English, history, drama, religious studies and modern foreign languages. The best examples of marking were helpful and informative, giving advice on ways of improving the quality of work. In class, teachers are well aware of any pupils' shortcomings, they offer guidance to solve problems, and it is the normal practice that verbal feedback is given. However, much of the work of pupils in some subjects was either left unmarked, or was given numerical marks with little comment, or was marked with a tick even though incomplete or incorrect.
- 2.28 Regular formal testing informs teachers' judgments of pupils' progress and enables accurate assessment of their performance. Heads of department analyse their results relative to expectations by national norms. A promising 'tracking' system is in development to help in the measurement of pupils' progress and takes as its starting point standardised scores indicative of each pupil's potential.
- 2.29 The college 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 As at the time of the last inspection, the pastoral care of the pupils continues to be of a high standard and is effective in reflecting the college aim to create a supportive community, in which all members are valued. In most respects, the college makes successful provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety, but was not fully aware of a few shortcomings. The college provides comprehensive pastoral care and guidance under the leadership of dedicated house staff who know the pupils very well. It had identified the need to increase the effectiveness of the weekly tutorial period. In conversations with pupils, formally and informally, inspectors found that the pupils felt well cared for and had someone to whom they could readily turn. "You are never alone at Epsom" was a particularly resonant phrase.
- 3.2 Pastoral arrangements assist staff, and since the last inspection there has been an evolving system of tutoring and an increase in the number of tutors. Commitment and care are displayed by tutors and pupils recognise this. However, there is a lack of a consistent and coherent structure across the houses with regard to allocated tutorial time, and profitable use of this time is not ensured through tight co-ordination, in spite of the introduction of co-ordinator posts. However, during the inspection, in one house the firing of water-propelled rockets, involving an element of team work, was enjoyable, and in another the ironing of shirts was a valuable skill.
- 3.3 From the beginning of their time in the college, pupils' needs are sensitively met. Evidence from pupils in Year 9 supports the view that their move to the college went very smoothly and they were particularly grateful for the help given to them by senior pupils. Throughout the college, relationships between pupils are observed to be good, including those between younger and older pupils. Relationships between staff and pupils are cordial and much appreciated. Pupils look to their teachers for academic help and guidance, which are given generously. Housemasters and housemistresses and pupil heads of house are trusted and valued. A member of the senior management team has oversight of house arrangements and chairs a fortnightly meeting of housemasters and housemistresses to promote a consistent approach to all matters. A housekeeper, chaplain and college counsellor provide an effective additional source of support and guidance.
- 3.4 Pupils know the college rules for discipline and behaviour, and most see them as reasonable and respect them. Inspectors did not find evidence to support the view of a significant minority of pupils that teachers are unfair in awarding rewards and punishments, except in so far as there is some unevenness in their application. Appropriate policies, 'praise' assemblies, a merit system and the booklet *Guidelines for Pupils* all help to promote good discipline and behaviour. Clear guidance is given to counter bullying. A revised policy was brought to the college (pupils') council for opinions and amendments. Recent incidents have been dealt with decisively, although in their pre-inspection questionnaires a significant minority of pupils expressed dissent from this view. The views of pupils are voiced through the college council and the house mechanisms, although in their questionnaire returns a significant minority of pupils were of the opinion that the college does not listen to their views or respond to them.
- 3.5 Measures to ensure the protection, health and safety of children are successful in most respects. A comprehensive, thoughtful safeguarding policy gives clear, practical guidance to staff on the college's expectations, practice and procedures, though it has not been fully operative for appointments of staff. All staff have received suitable training in applying the

policy, and it is updated annually. The child protection officer has deputies of both genders. In addition, prefects are trained in safeguarding practice. Registration is carried out according to a clear system, but it is subject to variability in the rigour of its implementation. The reasons for absence are not always entered in the follow-up by the tutor or housemaster or housemistress. The admission register is maintained as required, and all necessary measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards are taken. Fire practices are held regularly and recorded. A large number of staff are trained in first aid, many of them at the higher level. The medical centre provides ample care for pupils who are ill and can be accessed when needed. Detailed risk assessments are carried out for the college and for outside visits.

- 3.6 College meals prepared for the pupils at lunchtime are appetising, concentrating on healthy cooking with a choice of hot food or salad and a selection of desserts and fruit. Pupils are less content with evening meals. The college is successful in its commitment to promoting a healthy diet, developing healthy eating habits and encouraging the taking of regular exercise.
- 3.7 The college meets most of the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3]. In order to meet all the requirements, the college must:
- (a) ensure that the codes on the electronic attendance register are always updated to indicate whether an absence is authorised or not [Regulation 3.(9)];
 - (b) ensure that the safeguarding policy is fully implemented in respect of all staff appointments, including the additional requirements for boarding staff [Regulations 3.(2)(b) and 3.(3)].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.8 In accordance with its aims, the college has a highly effective partnership with parents and productive links with the wider community. Communications with parents have improved since the last inspection, through the development of the college website, a more consistent induction programme and the use of email.
- 3.9 In their replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire, the parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the education provided by the college. The vast majority are pleased with the progress of their children, the college curriculum, the information they receive and the homework set. They also rate the pastoral care highly in the help and guidance available, the attitudes and views promoted, the boarding provision, and above all the range of extra-curricular opportunities. However, a small minority were critical of the help for learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and there was some feeling that the college does not encourage parental involvement in its life and work. The inspectors agree with the positive views. As far as the criticisms are concerned, the inspectors did not find evidence to support these concerns. On the contrary, support for pupils with learning difficulties is well focused within a clearly established framework and is often of a high order.
- 3.10 Parents have good opportunities to be involved in activities and in the work and progress of their children. The strong house system provides a framework for this, and social occasions prior to events such as parents' evenings and the carol service help to foster the sense of community and partnership within the houses. The association Friends of Epsom College helps to promote links with parents. The planned move to automatic membership is intended to enable this important link to be developed further. The association also supports the college by providing grants for various items such as mats for the judo club and rucksacks to be used for The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The college makes good use of parents' expertise when providing careers advice to pupils and there is strong evidence from interviews with pupils that this help is much valued.

- 3.11 Newsletters and the regular updating of the website, as well as the regular email of a bulletin giving news and information, are greatly appreciated by parents. Parents of current and prospective pupils have many opportunities to get to know the college, and the induction programme, which was considered a strength in the last inspection, has been further developed with the introduction of a head of transition from previous schools to the college. Parents are kept up to date with routine information on college life through the calendar and the regularly updated website. This provides extremely convenient on-line access to the main college policy documents.
- 3.12 Full reports and short interim reports ('orders') serve as a good source of information about pupils' progress, and the majority of parents who responded to the parents' questionnaire found these helpful. Full reports provide useful information to parents about their children's attitudes and behaviour, but there is often a shortage of subject-specific comments highlighting weakness in subject skills and giving suggestions for their improvement. Some reports were noted where the comment did not exactly match the grade awarded.
- 3.13 The college handles the concerns of parents with care. Records of complaints scrutinised by inspectors provided evidence that there is a clear procedure. Responses to parents were detailed and, when it was felt that a parent's concern was justified, the college was fully prepared to review and modify existing procedures.
- 3.14 Very good links are promoted with the wider community and these are of great value in extending the pupils' experiences and their understanding of the world outside the college. They include musical and theatrical, sporting, educational, multi-cultural and charitable events and occasions. Community service activities are thriving and up to two dozen pupils help to care for the elderly each Wednesday, support is given to those with disabilities and sports leadership is offered to local maintained schools. The college chapel is used by other schools and organisations. Charitable work extends to the donation of surplus college uniforms to an overseas school and the hosting of a group of children from Chernobyl. The college has recently formed links with a London academy and is also assisting in the teaching of the academic curriculum at a local school.
- 3.15 The college meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

The Quality of Boarding Education

- 3.16 The boarding experience is of a high quality in supporting pupils' education and personal development, and it has some outstanding features. In line with the college aims, there is a happy, friendly and purposeful atmosphere conducive to a high moral code and respect towards others. Pupils are proud of their houses. Because of the format of the previous ISI report, it is not possible to make a comparison with the overall quality of boarding in 2003.
- 3.17 Relationships within houses are cordial and extremely positive, leading to a caring family community and enjoyment of the boarding experience. Day pupils are an integral part of their house, having morning and afternoon registration there and using house facilities for private study. They feel part of the boarding establishment and, along with the boarders, relate well to their peers. Regret was expressed by some at the future demise of day boarding opportunities, but the college is actively considering the introduction of an extended day. Pupils from different backgrounds mingle successfully and those from overseas easily become an integral part of the pupil body. If there are occasional issues among pupils, these are dealt with quickly, properly and firmly. Older pupils take their responsibilities for younger pupils very seriously, seeing themselves as models and ambassadors for the college. For example, Year 12 pupils take roll calls with quiet efficiency, enabling younger pupils to

appreciate the opportunity such occasions provide for leadership within each house. The high quality support provided by boarding house staff leads to pupils embracing the college ethos of putting maximum effort into all they do. The number of tutors in boarding houses has been strengthened to ensure favourable levels of supervision.

- 3.18 Sufficient provision is made for boarders' activities. During the week, after supervised prep, boarders have a period of relaxation with opportunities to take advantage of the kitchen and leisure facilities before going to bed. House staff take note of pupils' suggestions for activities and at weekends there is a good balance of off-site activities and time for relaxation, well earned after an intensive, active week. Weekend trips to the cinema and paint-balling have proved popular and appreciated by those who participate.
- 3.19 Boarding accommodation is good overall; recently renovated or rebuilt areas are excellent. Houses have spacious areas for relaxation, such as kitchens and common rooms, with good, well-used facilities, including televisions and games rooms. Pupils use computers either in their rooms via personal laptops, with wireless access, or through college desktops in common areas. Some of the college facilities, including those in the music department and sports areas, are also available during the early evening and weekend. A major refurbishment of one house is planned over the summer.
- 3.20 The college has worked with some success to implement the recommendations made in a Committee for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) report in 2005, but it has fallen short of one of the Standards (see the 'Leadership and Management' section).

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Governance is effective in overseeing most aspects of the college. The governing body includes valuable expertise in education, finance, management, marketing, charity governance, human resources, law, and medicine. Old Epsomians, and parents of current and previous pupils are included. Termly meetings are held for governors' sub-committees, designated as 'education and pastoral', 'finance and infrastructure', 'development' and 'teachers' conditions of service'. The whole senior management team is in attendance on the 'education and pastoral' sub-committee, and senior staff attend the other sub-committees as necessary; the headmaster attends all meetings. In addition, the governors are well informed through parents, pupils, and preparatory school heads, and before each meeting they invite staff to an informal buffet.
- 4.2 The governors acknowledge their responsibilities through involvement in the construction and monitoring of the college development plans. Through 'shadowing' a pupil, a significant proportion have sought first-hand evidence of the pupils' educational experience. The governors evaluate the examination results and are fully involved in matters of accommodation. They have an active interest in staffing, to ensure quality for the pupils' benefit. They responded purposefully to the last inspection and have presided over the improvement of accommodation and tutorial staffing.
- 4.3 Being well informed, the governors are strongly placed as 'critical friends' to the headmaster, bursar and senior management team. They show commitment to future success in the recruitment of pupils and in provision for them. They have championed the partnership with a London academy.
- 4.4 In most respects, the governors are successful in overseeing welfare, health and safety, though not in the oversight of human resources with regard to some details of appointment procedures. They work closely with the bursar's department on health and safety, and in May 2008 they attended briefing on safeguarding procedures. A governor has responsibility for safeguarding matters.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 The college is led and managed effectively, as at the last inspection, and it is successful in achieving its aims, although it has been slow to respond to some regulatory requirements and has many loosely defined development objectives. Evidence of strength lies in the quality of much of the teaching, the extensive opportunities for the pupils' personal development and the purposeful and happy atmosphere pervading the college. The experienced senior management team provides supportive, reflective and sensitive leadership, founded on a deep knowledge of the college. The quality of middle management is generally good, but development planning and the monitoring of standards are not sufficiently refined within departments, being under-emphasised in discharging the academic role of heads of department and the pastoral responsibilities of housemasters and housemistresses.
- 4.6 The structure of the senior management team has been usefully developed. Job specifications delineate management responsibilities and senior roles are shaped to individual strengths. Members of the senior management team work closely with governors, whilst operational matters are handled by the deputy heads' committee. Their hard work, approachability and commitment are central to the all-round success of the college.

- 4.7 Senior management has introduced initiatives to foster a high quality of education and success in a competitive marketplace. These initiatives have covered the shape of the college day, new management structures and examination courses, and the streamlining of admissions procedures. Staff development has benefited greatly from the design and implementation of a rigorous system, commanding staff confidence.
- 4.8 The college development plan is lengthy and unwieldy. It contains many broad objectives, focusing on academic and pastoral procedures rather than measurable outcomes. It lacks clear and challenging targets and is more a statement of aspiration than an effective management tool. Elements of the academic plan have been developed in consultation with heads of department, but the priorities established are not routinely reflected in departmental development planning, and evaluation is mainly through examination results.
- 4.9 Most departments are managed well and their leadership is sound. The quality of departmental management has improved, but it remains uneven. The responsibilities of members of the senior team have been refined to provide more systematic line management of academic departments and pastoral structures, but monitoring and the execution of perceived good practice have not been fully strengthened at all levels.
- 4.10 Heads of subject departments meet regularly and are diligent in monitoring their examination performance. Their routine documentation is informative and many new courses have been introduced. However, management in some departments is geared towards maintenance rather than improvement of quality. Heads of department are central to the appraisal process and most routinely observe teaching. However, procedures are not rigorous enough to ensure that good practice is shared. The recently established 'teaching and learning' group provides a promising mechanism for this development. The high quality of pastoral provision is rooted in the effective house system, although practice and policy are not wholly consistent. A strong ethos of care is evident, and pupils speak highly of this. Housemasters and housemistresses meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest.
- 4.11 Teachers are well qualified, hard-working and committed to their pupils' development. Recruitment procedures have been thorough in most respects, and all staff have Criminal Records Bureau certificates. The central register of appointments is to a suitable format. However, the necessary appointment procedures have not been fully implemented in the case of all non-teaching staff and overseas boarding staff. The school is now fully aware of the proper procedures for appointments.
- 4.12 The college appraisal scheme has the virtue of encompassing all aspects of each teacher's work, whether academic, pastoral or extra-curricular. Members of the senior management team are appraised by outside assessors. The staff development committee has established a wide-ranging and well-resourced programme tailored to individual needs and aspirations, as identified through appraisal. Outcomes are systematically monitored. Well-managed and effective support is provided for teachers new to the college and for newly qualified teachers and staff in training.
- 4.13 The college premises, accommodation and resources contribute significantly to the quality of the education offered to the pupils. The grounds and premises are maintained to an extremely good standard and recent building projects are of high quality. Resources are carefully husbanded and well deployed. The library is well stocked and efficiently managed. The medical centre has well-appointed facilities and qualified staff. However, in the music school, some practice rooms are not sufficiently sound-proofed.

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- 4.14 Routine administration is efficient and comprehensive. The college runs smoothly and the community takes pride in the college, its traditions and achievements.
- 4.15 The college meets most of the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff [Standard 4]. In order to meet all the requirements, the college must:
- (a) ensure that ensure that all parts of the appointments procedure are suitably complete before an appointee starts work and that the additional requirements for overseas boarding staff are fully met [Regulations 4.(2)(b), 4.(2)(e), 4C.(2)(d), 4C.(2)(g) and, for the same reason, Regulations 3.(2)(b) and 3.(3)].
- 4.16 The college meets the regulatory requirements for premises and accommodation [Standard 5].
- 4.17 The college 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 Epsom College is successful in furthering its ambitious aim to provide exceptional academic, social, sporting and cultural opportunities. This is strongly endorsed by parents and pupils. The pupils' achievement is very good in examinations and academic performance and they have considerable achievement in sport, music and extra-curricular activities. They are greatly assisted by their excellent attitudes to study and their advanced development in basic skills. The teaching which they receive is effective in promoting progress for pupils of all abilities. The pupils' personal development is outstanding. By the time they reach the sixth form, they are confident, reflective, articulate young people with a strong commitment to the college. Their personal qualities are fostered by the high quality of pastoral care, by the clearly defined responsibilities available to them within the house system, and by the rich variety of extra-curricular activities. The success of the college is helped by the highly effective relationship with parents and by productive links outside the school. However, attention to regulatory compliance has been relatively less successful for pupils' registration and staff appointments. The formulation of development planning has lacked sharpness and support by all subject departments to spread best practice in teaching, marking and reporting. The college has shown awareness of unevenness in its provision but its monitoring has not been sufficiently rigorous to promote a high level of consistency.
- 5.2 Since the last inspection, the senior leadership of the college, supported by the academic and pastoral managers, has maintained and in some respects enhanced the distinctive ethos and broad educational experience provided by the college and realised through the dedication of the staff. Beneficial developments have been achieved in management and pastoral structures, in day and boarding accommodation, in the increased numbers of girls and the enhanced provision and use of ICT. Progress has been made on the issues identified in the previous ISI inspection, but departmental management and registration procedures continue to deserve emphasis. The recommendations of the CSCI report have received beneficial attention, recently renewed.
- 5.3 The college complies with most of the regulatory requirements, but does not at present meet Standard 3 (welfare) and Standard 4 (appointment of staff).

Next Steps

- 5.4 The college has no major weaknesses, but to bring about further improvements to its educational provision, it should:
1. raise the quality of marking and reporting to include more subject-specific analysis and guidance to assist the pupils' subsequent progress;
 2. refine the college development plans to provide a smaller number of clearly identified objectives rigorously monitored;
 3. establish a clear rationale and systematic approach to the use of tutorial time.
- 5.5 In order to meet all the regulatory requirements, the college must:
- (1) ensure that the codes on the electronic attendance register are always updated to indicate whether an absence is authorised or not [Regulation 3.(9)];
 - (2) ensure that ensure that all parts of the appointments procedure are suitably complete before an appointee starts work and that the additional requirements for overseas boarding staff are fully met [Regulations 4.(2)(b), 4.(2)(e), 4C.(2)(d), 4C.(2)(g) and, for the same reason, Regulations 3.(2)(b) and 3.(3)].

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 5th to 8th May 2009. 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 the chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions, assemblies and a chapel service. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the college.

List of Inspectors

Mr Richard Shannon	Reporting Inspector
Mr Andrew Chicken	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Paul Clark	Head of Department, HMC school
Mrs Maggie Evans	Head, ISA school
Mr Geoff Lavery	Deputy Head, HMC school
Mrs Fiona McGill	Deputy Head, GSA school
Mr Ian Rowley	Senior Tutor, HMC school
Mr David Williams	Director of Studies, SHMIS school