



**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**BRITISH SCHOOLS OVERSEAS**

**INSPECTION REPORT ON  
HILLCREST INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Hillcrest International Schools

Full Name of School	<b>Hillcrest International Schools</b>
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Head of Preparatory School	<b>Mrs Gabrielle Maina</b>
Head of Secondary School	<b>Mr John Eveson</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Bob Kikuyu</b>
Age Range	<b>1 to 18</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>535</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (273 boys; 262 girls)</b>
Numbers by Age	<b>0-5: 58    6-13: 185 14-18: 292</b>
Number of Day Pupils	<b>Total: 507</b>
Number of Boarders	<b>Total: 28</b>
Inspection dates	<b>7 to 10 November 2016</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI Schedule* for the inspection of British schools overseas. The inspection consists of two parts: a preliminary two-day visit followed by a four-day (team) inspection. The previous ISI inspection was in November 2012.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is a body approved by the British Government for the purpose of inspecting schools in England and overseas. As such, ISI reports to the English Department for Education (DfE) on the extent to which schools meet the relevant Standards for British Schools Overseas and the *ISI Framework* requirements. ISI is also the agency responsible for the inspection of schools in membership of the Associations of the Independent Schools Council (ISC). Accordingly, ISI inspections of British schools overseas are required to:

- help schools to improve the quality and effectiveness of pupils' education and of the care for their welfare;
- provide objective and reliable inspection reports which help schools to recognise and build on their strengths and to identify and remedy any weaknesses;
- inform parents and the wider public of the quality of British schools overseas by placing reports in the public domain;
- report to the DfE the extent to which schools comply with the published Standards for British Schools Overseas;
- where applicable, assure ISC Associations that their member schools maintain the quality of provision expected.

ISI inspection is for the benefit of the pupils in the schools and through public reporting makes the information available to parents, governments and the wider community.

Inspections for British schools overseas follow closely the framework and guidance for independent school inspection in England. The major difference is that schools in England must comply with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which do not apply with legal validity to schools outside the United Kingdom. However, the inspection of overseas schools takes account where possible of compliance with any local requirements and it judges the extent to which the schools comply with the British Government's Standards for British Schools Overseas. The range of these Standards is as follows.

1. The quality of education provided by the school (Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment).
2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils.
4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff.
5. The premises and accommodation.
6. The provision of information for parents, carers and others.
7. The school's procedures for handling complaints.
8. The quality of provision for boarding.
9. Leadership and management of the school.

**The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:**

- (i) **an exhaustive health and safety audit**
- (ii) **an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features**

- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures**
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment or company law.**

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Hillcrest International Schools provide day education for boys and girls from between the age of 18 months to 18 years. Boarding accommodation is provided from the age of 11. The preparatory (prep) school was founded in 1965, the secondary school in 1975 and Hillcrest Early Years in 2000. The schools are owned by Hillcrest Investments Limited, whose board of directors oversee the financial management of the schools. A separate governing body, comprising parents and other professional volunteers, maintains educational oversight of the three schools. At the time of the inspection, the headteachers for early years and the prep school had been in post for less than a year, and the head of secondary for less than three months. The school's previous inspection was in November 2012.
- 1.2 The school aims to develop key skills of numeracy, literacy and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and to enable pupils to achieve their full academic potential in external examinations. It seeks to inspire curiosity, develop resilience, develop a life-long love of learning and promote a lasting and positive attitude towards health and fitness.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection, the schools had 535 pupils, 273 boys and 262 girls, and provided boarding accommodation for 27 pupils. Hillcrest early years educates 58 children from the age of one to the end of Year 1. The prep school caters for 185 pupils in Years 2 to 8, and the secondary school has 292 pupils in Years 9 to 13, of whom 114 are in the sixth form. Most pupils come from professional and business families living in the western suburbs of Nairobi and represent a very wide range of cultural backgrounds. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school part way through their education, because their parents' work commitments have required relocation to or out of Kenya, is high.
- 1.4 The ability profile of pupils varies throughout the school, but is broadly average as measured by standardised tests. Just under 20 per cent of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia. Most of these pupils receive additional support from the schools' learning support departments. Around 40 different nationalities are represented in the school. A minority of pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL), and their competence in English varies widely on entry to the school.
- 1.5 English National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 The schools are successful in fulfilling their aims to develop key skills and enable pupils to achieve their academic potential. Pupils make good progress in all three schools, culminating in most pupils gaining places at their first-choice university when they leave Year 13. The pupils' good academic achievements are the result of good curricular provision and teaching which is typically good and, at times, excellent; a small minority of teaching does not always engage pupils' interest or provide them with sufficient challenge. Pupils with SEND make good progress, particularly in the secondary school where pupils and teachers speak highly of the input provided by the learning support department. Pupils with EAL and those who join the school part way through their education appreciate the supportive environment and friendly atmosphere which encourage them to make good progress. Pupils achieve extremely well in a wide-range of extra-curricular activities, with achievements in sport being particularly noteworthy.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is excellent. In all three schools, the pupils display excellent levels of maturity for their age. They are articulate, self-confident and socially assured. They have an extremely well-developed understanding of different cultures, reflecting the cultural diversity within the schools, and show spiritual sensitivity. Relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff are excellent. The pupils are thoughtful of others, as reflected in their active support of different charities and those who are less fortunate than themselves. They carry out responsibilities well. Staff are caring and supportive. The schools have thorough safeguarding arrangements and pay close attention to pupils' welfare, health and safety. Appropriate measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards and to provide medical attention for those who require it. Careful checks are made on pupils' attendance, but the system for collating attendance information does not always work properly. Boarding arrangements make a significant contribution to the welfare, achievements and development of those who use this facility.
- 2.3 Although a minority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed dissatisfaction with the governance and management of the schools, their concerns largely relate to issues which lie in the past. Current governance, leadership and management are good. Over the last year, the board of directors has demonstrated its commitment to the schools by improving facilities and has strengthened governance arrangements. New leadership in all three schools has shown itself to be effective in improving staff morale, introducing initiatives which have improved the quality of education and setting a clear agenda for the future development of the schools. These changes have been driven by the schools' senior leaders, but have not sufficiently involved middle leaders. Improvements have been made to many of the school's policies and procedures, particularly with regard to the safeguarding of pupils. Leaders and governors do not have systems which ensure regular and systematic review of all of the schools' policies. Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and about what is happening, and are given good opportunities to be involved in the life of the schools.

**2.(b) Action points****(i) Compliance with the Standards for British Schools Overseas**

(The range of the Standards for British Schools Overseas is given in the Preface)

2.4 The schools meets all the requirements of the Standards for British Schools Overseas.

**(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Ensure that all teaching engages pupils' attention and interest, provides them with sufficient levels of challenge for their ability and moves their learning on at a good pace.
2. Involve middle leaders more fully in reviewing the quality of teaching, analysing educational provision and leading improvements.
3. Ensure that the governing body and the school's senior leaders devise and implement a plan for the regular review of the impact and relevance of all school policies and procedures.
4. Implement a reliable system to collate and monitor the school's attendance data.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills**

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills are good. Pupils are educated well, in line with the schools' aims. They are curious and resilient, are interested in the world around them, and are keen to achieve the best of which they are capable. Outside the classroom, their achievement in a wide variety of activities, many of which are led by the pupils themselves, is excellent.
- 3.2 In the early years, children develop their language skills well. By the end of Year 1, they show a good understanding of initial sounds, blending them to make simple words and using them well in their writing. They work competently with numbers. They show high levels of creativity and confidence.
- 3.3 In the prep school, pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance against national tests but, on the evidence available, including the school's own data, it is judged to be above the age-related expectations for English pupils. Pupils, including those with SEND and EAL, make good progress. Occasionally, the attainment of the most able pupils is limited because the teaching provides insufficient challenge.
- 3.4 By the end of Year 2, most pupils read fluently and write accurately and creatively. They have a secure sense of mathematical concepts. By the end of Year 8, most pupils, especially the most able, are highly articulate, and read with fluency, expression and enthusiasm. Even though some are working in English as an additional language, they write confidently and fluently in a variety of styles and use punctuation accurately. They acquire good mathematical ability and are skilled at handling numerical data. They achieve good standards of creativity in art, music and drama. In some lessons, pupils use their ICT skills well.
- 3.5 At all levels of the school, pupils develop good basic skills for learning, in accordance with the school's aims, and apply their literacy and numeracy skills well in a variety of situations across the curriculum. They have positive attitudes to learning, and are focused and attentive when working. They develop excellent speaking and listening skills. These were demonstrated to great effect in a prep school assembly: the school listened attentively as the head boy and head girl confidently described the highlights of a recent sports event and inspired all of the adults and pupils who were present to make a commitment to their hopes and aspirations. Throughout the prep school, the pupils work collaboratively and creatively. This was seen, for example, as pupils in Year 7 worked together to design and build bird houses and, in another session, prepared for the 'Year 7 Has Got Talents' show.
- 3.6 The pupils achieve well in music and sport and enjoy participating in the regular music events and school productions. They learn to swim at the school and some go on to swim competitively. They also compete with great success in football, cricket, rugby, hockey, athletics and rounders competitions against other schools. They are proud of their participation and achievements.
- 3.7 The following analysis relates to the years 2014 and 2015, the most recent two years for which statistical comparisons are available. In the secondary school, results in IGCSE examinations have been above average in relation to worldwide norms and at A level have been similar to the English national average for maintained schools. Of the IGCSE examination results in 2016, 84 per cent were graded between A\* and C. At A level, pupils achieved a 94 per cent pass rate, with 61 per cent of results graded A\* to C. These results show that pupils make good progress in relation to their starting

points. In 2016, 85 per cent of school graduates secured places at their first choice of university, mostly in the UK, USA and Canada. Pupils are well motivated to succeed and are diligent in their approach to work. Because of the support provided by the school, pupils with SEND and EAL are enabled to fulfil their potential. All pupils exhibit elements of a 'lifelong love of learning' to which the school aspires. Pupils are articulate, listen carefully to their teachers, read widely and write well in a variety of forms. Pupils also use personal devices effectively for research and for note-making; good use of ICT was observed, for example, in psychology and music lessons.

- 3.8 Standards of attainment are improving. Pupils have benefited from a new system for tracking their progress. Results from standardised tests have been used to set individual targets. Pupils are aware of their academic strengths and weaknesses and understand what is required for them to make progress and have developed a stronger focus on their academic work. However, pupils commented on inconsistency in the application of the new system, and scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with teachers showed this to be the case. Pupils, nevertheless, have very positive attitudes towards learning. Pupils in Years 12 and 13, in particular, are highly motivated to succeed and are effective independent learners. They have excellent working relationships with their teachers.
- 3.9 Pupils participate with great enthusiasm and enjoyment in an excellent programme of extra-curricular activities which contribute strongly to pupils' achievements and sense of self-worth. Sport, music and drama are well provided for. School teams have been successful in tournaments in football, cross-country, netball and rounders as shown by the many medals awarded in assembly. The choir has been involved in a national Kenyan event with a world-renowned conductor and there are opportunities to be involved in school productions. A number of clubs, started and led by pupils, contribute a great deal to the development of leadership and independent thinking among secondary pupils. These include the environmental club, 'Interact' and the parliamentary group. Debating is strong, and the weekly debates are well supported by the whole school and much enjoyed.

**3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)**

- 3.10 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is good in all three schools. The curriculum supports the schools' aims and is effective in its coverage of the requisite areas of learning. It is suitable for all ages, abilities and needs.
- 3.11 The curriculum for the early years provides an excellent range of highly appropriate activities and is well resourced. Arrangements for language and literacy development are effective and enable good progress for all, including those who have EAL.
- 3.12 In the prep school, there is a strong emphasis on numeracy and literacy. Older pupils are prepared for entry to secondary school via Common Entrance or scholarship examinations. The provision for pupils with SEND is good, having recently been extended and improved. Support is provided in class, and pupils are also withdrawn from a few lessons for one-to-one sessions. Pupils are supported through individual education plans (IEPs).
- 3.13 The prep school's provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent. A wide range of clubs and activities caters for many interests and talents which benefit the pupils physically, intellectually and socially. Creative, physical, academic and musical clubs are available, including activities such as African dance, public speaking, scouts, creative arts, aerobics, gardening and computing. As well as activities offered by members of staff, some are organised by outside providers such as ballet and pottery.

The pupils greatly enjoy the wide range of teacher-led activities on Fridays. The school values the importance of residential and non-residential trips as part of a well-rounded education and makes the most of its geographical location by providing a variety of excellent trips and visits for pupils.

- 3.14 The secondary school fulfils its aim of providing a curriculum which is balanced, flexible and rigorous. In Year 9, pupils study a broad range of subjects prior to making their IGCSE choices. Pupils have a large number of option choices for IGCSE in Year 10, including options such as food studies, Latin and drama. At A level, pupils usually study four subjects from a good range of available options. The school is reviewing its provision in the light of the reform of A levels and the entry profile of pupils to ensure it continues to offer an appropriate curriculum.
- 3.15 The provision for pupils with SEND and EAL is excellent. In Year 9, all pupils are screened, and IEPs are developed for those who are identified as requiring support. There is flexibility in the number of subjects which pupils study, and support for individual pupils is effective, focused and warmly supportive. Learning support is provided in lessons too, and this is very much valued by teachers and highly effective in supporting pupils. All teachers value the support they are given to enable them to teach pupils with SEND and EAL effectively and ensure that those pupils fulfil their potential. Support for all pupils is a key feature of the school's curriculum and seen as one of its most important facets.
- 3.16 The curriculum is well resourced. Facilities for ICT are good, and pupils use them effectively in their learning. The newly refurbished library is used well, particularly by older pupils, and helps develop independence. There is a wide-ranging programme of external speakers, and pupils are grateful for the opportunities this offers for discussion and debate.
- 3.17 The provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent, and pupils participate in a very wide range of activities. Provision for sport is strong, particularly for team sports, although a few pupils would like to see more attention given to individual sports. Pupils represent the school with skill and pride, and achieve success in many tournaments, with teams regularly reaching finals. Music and drama similarly offer many opportunities for performance, some of which are pupil-led initiatives, such as the forthcoming performance of *An Inspector Calls*. The Friday afternoon activities programme is very popular with pupils and teachers, and offers all pupils opportunities in many different sports and clubs.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.18 The contribution of teaching is good. It enables pupils to achieve well and supports the schools' aims. The teaching generally shows a good understanding of pupils' differing abilities and needs, and makes good provision for those with SEND or EAL. Occasionally, the teaching does not provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils, particularly in the prep school.
- 3.19 In the early years, staff promote active learning at every opportunity through their planned and informal interactions with the children. The implementation of 'learning journeys' provides an effective and efficient method of recording observations to monitor children's individual progress, guide future planning and create next steps for children's learning. The teaching creates an environment with high levels of enjoyment which helps to develop children's independence and fosters their imagination. In garden time, for example, the children used their imagination to recreate a safari in which they stalked leopards. Teachers use skilful intervention to extend children's learning experiences and to help them persevere in their learning.

- 3.20 In the prep school, the teaching is characterised by high-quality relationships between teachers and pupils and an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Teachers create a safe learning environment in which pupils can explore ideas and develop critical thinking skills. The pupils feel valued and confident. Repeatedly, pupils commented that their teachers are excellent and that they work hard to ensure their learning needs are met. Classroom behaviour is excellent.
- 3.21 In the secondary school, the teachers are committed to professional development and are reflective practitioners, as stated in the school's aims. Lessons are well planned, and the very large majority are effective, enabling pupils to make good progress. Teachers value and make appropriate use of the excellent support provided for individual pupils with SEND and EAL. During the inspection, for example, teachers provided a range of different but well-judged tasks which were well suited to the needs of pupils with SEND and EAL in a biology lesson in Year 10 and an English lesson in Year 11. This was a result of the information provided in IEPs and the expertise of the teachers in implementing the appropriate strategies and managing the classroom effectively. Classrooms are well equipped, and displays of pupils' work reinforce learning and provide encouragement for pupils. The working atmosphere in classrooms is very supportive and all pupils feel valued. Teachers speak warmly about the pupils and are committed to enabling them to achieve the best grades of which they are capable in national examinations.
- 3.22 Although the overall judgement is that the quality of teaching is good, there is considerable variation across the three schools. Some of the teaching is excellent: it is challenging, fast paced and imaginative. It employs a variety of activities such as group work or role-play and provides differentiated tasks for the wide range of abilities within the class. It encourages independent thinking and opportunities for discussion and perseverance. It sets high expectations of what pupils can achieve and, in the prep school, ensures teaching assistants are used effectively to support the pupils. In a small minority of lessons, however, the teaching is less effective: pupils are unsure of what they are supposed to learn and they sit quietly but without the same level of engagement that is evident in most other lessons. The pace of teaching is insufficient to test the most able, and too much attention is given to repetition. Pupils speak enthusiastically about those lessons in which they are 'active learners' and feel that they learn more as a result. They say that a small proportion of teaching does not help them to make sufficient progress; the findings of the inspection corroborate this view. The marking of pupils' work is generally thorough and detailed, but is inconsistent across subjects and noted as such by pupils. In the secondary school, excellent marking in English, making full use of the target scheme and containing detailed comments for further improvement, is an exemplar of good practice.

## 4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

### 4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent. The schools fully meet their aims for pupils to respect and value each other in a multicultural family and for them to develop a spirit of intellectual enquiry. By the time they leave each school, the pupils are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their lives in terms of their personal development.
- 4.2 In all three schools, the pupils are articulate, self-confident and welcoming. They are socially assured. Older pupils talk with pride of the friendly atmosphere of the school and the excellent relationships both amongst pupils and between pupils and staff. Pupils in both the prep and secondary schools relish being buddies of new pupils.
- 4.3 Pupils develop sensitivity to the non-material, and this is shown in the vibrant artwork displayed around the schools promoting environmental concerns. Pupils acquire an excellent sense of spirituality; for example, two pupils were observed discussing Remembrance Day and its significance and were able to relate this to their own experiences. In an English lesson in the secondary school featuring the poem *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, pupils' thoughtful responses to the death of the young soldiers showed great maturity and understanding of the effect of conflict on the spirituality of society.
- 4.4 Pupils exhibit a clear sense of right and wrong. They have an extremely well developed awareness of justice and fairness, and this leads the older pupils in each school to initiate many activities throughout the school year to support a variety of humanitarian charities, both locally and internationally.
- 4.5 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the need for laws and the importance of democracy. Older pupils in the prep school, for example, took a great interest in the outcome of the American election, which occurred during the week of the inspection, discussing the way events in one country might have profound effects in another. A pupil-initiated session in an economics lesson in the secondary school revolved around the potential change in oil prices and the impact this might have on their own society.
- 4.6 Pupils in both the prep and secondary schools are keen to take on positions of responsibility and are willing to undergo a rigorous application process. Successful candidates are proud of these roles and carry out their duties, such as helping younger pupils, conscientiously. In the secondary school, the prefects take responsibility for some of the intervention systems that help the younger pupils, and they lead the charity groups.
- 4.7 Pupils show an excellent understanding of the many different cultures present in the three schools. This is clearly seen in the harmonious relationships and open celebrations of their friends' traditions. Pupils celebrate enthusiastically a wide range of festivals from all areas of the world: Diwali, Hanukkah, Chinese New Year, Christmas and, in tribute to the host country, Utamaduni, a Kenyan cultural celebration. In their work, pupils develop an excellent appreciation of the cultural heritage of different parts of the world. For example, a child in Year 1 associated a display of fruit being used in the classroom with the drawings of Paul Cezanne, whilst a pupil in the prep school produced designs based on the work of Clarice Cliff. Older pupils reflect on the commonality of experience through the prism of their own culture. This was seen clearly in a reflective remembrance assembly in the secondary school

featuring a Sudanese poem, accompanied by the choir. Pupils have an appropriate understanding of the key features of life in the United Kingdom.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety**

- 4.8 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is good. In the early years and the prep school, staff know the pupils and their families extremely well, and these positive relationships ensure that each pupil is treated in accordance with their individual needs. Pupils are enthused about the friendly atmosphere in the school, particularly about the bonding trips at the beginning of a new academic year. They appreciate the support they receive from the teachers. Additional provision is available in some subjects, such as mathematics, while extra coaching sessions are available before school in sports. The prep school has recently established supportive discussion sessions for girls and boys separately, where pupils can discuss worries and concerns in an open and accepting forum. The younger pupils have regular circle times when topics such as behaviour, kindness, friendship and the importance of rules are explored and discussed.
- 4.9 In the secondary school, pupils are supported well by their tutors, heads of year and the careers advisor. The addition of a career advisor and mentor, in particular, is seen as an excellent addition to the school staff, not only in providing support for pupils' mental health and welfare, but also as a support for the careers provision. The heads of year have detailed knowledge of the students under their care and liaise directly with parents to create supportive networks of staff, parents and students when a concern is raised. Relationships between staff and students are excellent, and all pupils questioned felt there were adults they could talk to. Students are very supportive of each other; for example, an inter-house debate was attended and supported by over a third of the school.
- 4.10 In the pre-inspection questionnaires, concerns about the pastoral care in the school were evident from a minority of parents. Inspectors found that the leadership of the schools has independently recognised many of these concerns and recently introduced systems and procedures to address of them. A copy of the anti-bullying policy is available on the website, and procedures are carefully followed. Pupils are confident that there is very little bullying and, when it does occur, say that it is dealt with effectively.
- 4.11 In the early years, the warm relationships between staff and children and the favourable adult to child ratio ensure that squabbles and disagreements are minimised and, if they do occur, that they are soon resolved.
- 4.12 In their response to the questionnaire, a minority of pupils felt that teachers do not treat pupils equally and do not listen to their views and respond to them. In the prep school, pupils are particularly appreciative of the new measures such as the 'concern box', where worries can be posted, and the new 'rainbow room', where they are able to discuss any issues with a counsellor. A new behaviour management system is now in place, and each class displays a 'behaviour ladder'. If the class achieves a certain number of top rungs, the whole class shares a treat or privilege. This is highly valued, and both pupils and staff spoke appreciatively of the positive impact it has had on the school.
- 4.13 The secondary school is developing new pastoral structures in response to concerns raised, and the students report that they are valued and supported under this new system. The strength of relationships between students and staff is a major factor in the success of these initiatives.

- 4.14 The school's safeguarding arrangements have proper regard for pupils' welfare. The school has thorough arrangements to ensure the security and safety of the pupils whilst on the school sites. The safeguarding policy has been recently updated and provides clear guidance for staff on how to handle any safeguarding concerns. Training is provided for all members of staff to ensure they are conversant with the school's procedures. Safeguarding arrangements are overseen and co-ordinated by senior members of staff, and prominent posters make clear to both staff and pupils to whom they should turn if they have particular concerns.
- 4.15 The school takes necessary measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. A fire safety audit has been undertaken recently. Fire alarm and monitoring systems are serviced regularly by a specialist company. Fire drills are held in all three schools, and a follow-up drill was undertaken earlier in the term in the secondary school to ensure that lessons had been learnt from the previous drill. Regular health and safety audits are undertaken, issues are identified and action is taken to remedy them. Risk assessments are carried out. Accidents are recorded and the results monitored for any patterns.
- 4.16 The school makes good provision for pupils who are ill or injured. Pupils on the two school sites have access to a full-time nurse who is available to deal with any health issues. Various members of staff are qualified in first aid. Personalised support is provided for pupils who have SEND.
- 4.17 The school places a strong emphasis on keeping healthy through taking regular exercise in physical education lessons, and offers many opportunities for further physical activity through the extensive extra-curricular programme. Healthy eating habits are encouraged through displays and the provision of nutritious meals at lunchtime.
- 4.18 The school's admission register is properly maintained. Pupils' attendance is recorded electronically, and a register is taken every lesson in the secondary school. However, the software used to transfer the electronic registration to the school's central management information system is unreliable with the result that the central recording of attendance does not always provide an accurate overview of attendance which is in accordance with teachers' individual registers.

#### **4.(c) The quality of boarding education**

- 4.19 The quality of boarding is good. Outcomes for boarders are good and their personal development is clearly promoted by their boarding experience. Boarding makes a small but significant contribution to the school meeting its aims of developing students who respect and value each other. Boarders are confident that they have someone to whom they can turn should they have a concern either in or out of the house. The telephone numbers of the safeguarding leads, mentor and career advisor and independent listener are widely displayed.
- 4.20 Boarders say they enjoy living in the house and think of themselves as a family. They consider that their views matter and that relationships between pupils and staff and between pupils are excellent. They praise the quality of the boarding staff. Boarders are polite and considerate to each other and to visitors. Boarders are encouraged to have regular contact with friends and parents, and all have access to mobile devices in order to facilitate this.
- 4.21 The academic performance of the boarders is closely monitored, and support structures are put in place to deal with the more able or those who are struggling. Visiting day staff come to the house on occasion to assist with extra classes in the

evening. There are regular minuted meetings of the boarding house where issues are raised, concerns answered and success praised. Changes brought about as a result of pupils' input include the enhancement of the wi-fi speed and improvement in the showers.

- 4.22 The boarding house is managed extremely well, supported by the implementation of suitable and sensible policies and procedures. The supervision of the boarders is appropriate and timely. The boarding team is responsive to the needs of the students and is trying to ensure that conditions are always improving. Staff also respond quickly to parental communication and are successful at managing this relationship.
- 4.23 In the pupils' questionnaire, the majority of boarders said that there are not enough facilities and activities available to them at the weekend. When interviewed, the boarders said that this situation is improving, although they would still appreciate more available opportunities. The number of resident boarding staff increased in size just before the inspection; the change has been made in order to offer a more varied evening and weekend programme. Trips out on Sundays have included go-karting and visits to an animal orphanage, local farms and factories.
- 4.24 The standard of the boarding accommodation is excellent. Pupils' bedrooms, which they may personalize, are spacious, well-furnished and provide lockable spaces. The common room is excellently provisioned for a house of its size and capacity. The on-site catering for the boarders is of a high standard and is carefully planned to be healthy and nutritious; the pupils appreciate the quality of this provision.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

- 5.1 The quality of governance is good. Although half of the parents' questionnaire responses expressed dissatisfaction with the governance of the school, inspectors found that their concerns largely relate to issues which lie in the past, such as the sale of land which was previously part of the school grounds, a period of unsettled leadership of the three schools, and to perceived uncertainty with regard to the ownership of the schools. Whilst acknowledging the legitimacy of parental concerns and the difficulties which the schools have faced in the past, the inspection findings show that the board of directors has taken decisive steps to improve leadership and management and has demonstrated strong commitment to the schools and their future development. It has also ensured a much stronger structure for governance by establishing a separate governing body to oversee educational direction whilst directors attend to financial management.
- 5.2 The governing body maintains effective oversight through its termly meetings, whilst separate groups of governors oversee the educational standards and provision in each of the three schools. Working groups have reconsidered the schools' overall mission and specific aims to ensure that they reflect the needs of the school community and provide a clear vision for high-quality international education which is relevant to the modern world. The chair of the governing body meets regularly with the headteachers of each school. Investment has resulted in major improvements to the fabric of the buildings. Areas such as the libraries and reception areas in the prep and secondary schools, science laboratories in the secondary school and classrooms and outdoor areas in the early years have been fully refurbished. Many areas have been redecorated as part of an ongoing programme to improve the overall environment. The construction of two new accommodation blocks and a communal building have greatly improved facilities for boarders. Investment in staffing ensures a very favourable ratio of staff to pupils in all areas, and a significantly increased budget for the professional development of staff is opening up greater opportunities for their professional development. The schools are well resourced.
- 5.3 Through their twice-termly meetings and reports from the headteachers, the three groups of governors are gaining good insight into the working of the three schools and their plans for development, and are beginning to provide a more effective mechanism for holding the schools' leaders to account for the educational standards achieved and the quality of education than was the case in the past. New members, including a number of parents, have been recruited to bring a wider range of expertise and experience to the governing body to provide support for the schools' leaders. Systems are in place to evaluate the work of the headteachers. Although the schools have policies to guide all aspects of the schools' work, the governing body does not have a systematic procedure for reviewing these policies and evaluating how effective they are in practice.
- 5.4 The governing body has a nominated member who oversees the schools' procedures for safeguarding and ensures that designated staff are effective in discharging their responsibilities for child protection. The board checks regularly that procedures for ensuring the suitability of staff and for maintaining appropriate appointment records are fulfilled and that careful attention is given to welfare, health and safety.

## **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management**

- 5.5 The quality of leadership and management is good. Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced a period of instability in the leadership of all three schools. This has led to a lack of continuity in implementing initiatives and a disjointed approach to school improvement, justifying the concerns expressed by a minority of parents in the questionnaire over the way the school has been managed in the past. Over the last year, however, new leadership has brought significant momentum to the schools' development, resulting in major improvement in all three schools arising from self-evaluation undertaken by the schools' senior leaders. Pupils talk positively about changes that have been implemented in the secondary school. Discussions with many members of staff indicate that staff morale has improved markedly in all three schools as a result of the clear educational direction provided by the schools' senior leaders, who have been effective in evaluating the quality of education and identifying where and how the schools need to improve. Despite the many changes, the schools have never lost sight of the importance of their core purpose, and subject leaders and coordinators have ensured that the quality of teaching and the extensive range of extra-curricular involvement have enabled pupils to achieve well and to demonstrate excellence in their personal development. In all three schools, senior leaders have started the process of reviewing and, where necessary, rewriting policies and procedures, but various policies have not been reviewed since their initial implementation some years ago.
- 5.6 In early years, leadership has brought substantial change to both the indoor and the outdoor learning environments, thus enabling greater opportunities for stimulating and creative play-based activities in line with the school's revised aims of helping children to develop confidence, independence, determination and regard for each other. In the prep school, leadership has provided greater clarity as to what is expected of teachers and implemented a system to monitor the quality of teaching and develop teachers' understanding of how to improve their practice. In the secondary school, leadership has started to make more effective use of data by tracking pupils' progress to ensure pupils are not falling behind and to fulfil the school's aim of ensuring all pupils achieve their full academic potential. These initiatives have implemented two of the recommendations from the previous inspection. Many other improvements have been made, but these examples serve to illustrate that senior leaders are having a demonstrable impact on improving the quality of education in the school.
- 5.7 Leaders in all three schools have ensured there are sufficient staff to support pupils and to meet the needs of the curriculum. Steps have been taken to support and develop staff and to improve the quality of teaching but, although there are some opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from each other's practice, middle managers are not yet sufficiently involved in the process of evaluating the quality of teaching, providing support for those whose practice requires improvement and leading improvements. In the secondary school, they have, however, provided clearer guidance for staff through the introduction of subject and departmental handbooks and have been involved in the process of analysing examination results and identifying areas for improvement.
- 5.8 The leadership and management of safeguarding have been strengthened. The appointment of designated safeguarding leads and deputies for each school ensures that there is always a senior member of staff present on each site who has a full and secure understanding of safeguarding responsibilities. Training for staff, dissemination of information and strategically placed posters ensure that all staff and pupils know what to do should any concerns arise and that staff have a secure understanding of their responsibilities with regard to pupils' welfare, health and safety.

The school has thorough arrangements for checking the suitability of staff and governors.

### **5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.9 The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians is good. The schools maintain a constructive relationship with parents in accordance with their aims. Parents and prospective parents are provided with the required information about the schools, through the prospectus and the website, including the schools' policies on safeguarding, complaints and anti-bullying. In all three schools, parents are provided with considerable information about the progress of their children, through 'learning journeys' in the early years, reports in the prep and secondary school, and recently introduced data sheets in the secondary school. Parent consultation evenings are held regularly, and the leadership has sought parents' views through evaluation sheets on how these can be improved.
- 5.10 A minority of parents expressed concern in their questionnaire responses with the way that complaints are handled, while a small minority were concerned about the ease of communication, and the speed of response to questions. Inspection evidence did not support these concerns. Inspectors examined records of complaints and consider that the school follows its published procedures carefully.
- 5.11 Parents are frequently invited into the school for productions and assemblies, such as the pupil-initiated and pupil-led assembly in the prep school on 'commitment' during the week of the inspection. Curriculum evenings, when aspects of the teaching of subjects such as reading and mathematics are explored, are held regularly. Parents participate in cultural celebrations. In the secondary school, parents use their expertise and contacts to discuss their professions at the careers conventions or provide work experience for Hillcrest students.
- 5.12 In the prep school and early years, recently instituted parents' forums have been established with a representative from each form. The prep school forum has helped to devise a parental code of conduct, and representatives take on the role of moderator for their year groups. The secondary school leadership has initiated a weekly contact time for parents to discuss any issue, while in the early years almost daily contact enables warm constructive relationships to be established between parents and staff. In the prep school, parents are encouraged to discuss any issues with their children's form teacher.
- 5.13 Parent volunteers are welcomed to contribute to reading support and to help with theatrical productions. Parents may contact teachers through email, and the headteachers provide parents with a phone number for personal contact. The virtual learning environment (VLE) enables parents to have a close understanding of the work of their children through, for example, lesson plans and homework requirements, although not all parts of the VLE are updated regularly. Weekly newsletters and bulletins provide parents with insight into the work of the schools, and parents of younger pupils receive an overview of topics that will be covered in the coming week. In the early years, daily boards enable parents to see what topics their children have been involved with so that they can support their progress.

## INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and staff and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff, the chair of governors and the chair of the board. They observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

Mr Graham Sims	Reporting Inspector
Ms Dawn Akyurek	Junior Team Inspector (Head, COBIS school, Spain)
Mrs Eithne Webster	Junior Team Inspector (Former head, IAPS school, UK)
Mr David Miles	Senior Team Inspector (International education director, HMC school, UK)
Mr Kevin Riley	Senior Team Inspector (Former head, HMC school, UK)