

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Aberdour Preparatory School

Full Name of the School	Aberdour Preparatory School
DCSF Number	936/6000
Early Years Number	EY337953
Registered Charity Number	312033
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Chairman of Governors	Mr Richard Nicol
Age Range (of the whole school)	2 to 13
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	27th to 30th April 2009
Head of Early Years Setting	Mrs Kate Evans
Early Years Age Range	2 to 5
Early Years Gender	Mixed
Early Years Foundation Stage Inspection Dates	19th and 20th January 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 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. The inspection was carried out by ISI, a body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting EYFS provision in schools belonging to the ISC Associations. Section 7 of this report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the EYFS Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the Statutory Framework for children's learning, development and welfare, known as the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Characteristics of the School	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION	3
	The Educational Experience Provided	3
	Pupils' Learning and Achievements.....	4
	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils	5
	The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment).....	7
3.	THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS	9
	The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils.....	9
	The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community	10
4.	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT	12
	The Quality of Governance	12
	The Quality of Leadership and Management	12
5.	CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS.....	14
	Overall Conclusions	14
	Next Steps.....	14
6.	SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE	15
	List of Inspectors	15
7.	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE (EYFS)	16
	What the Setting Should Do to Improve	17
	Complaints Since the Last Inspection	17

1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Aberdour Preparatory School is an independent, co-educational day school for pupils from the ages of two to thirteen. It was founded in 1933 as a boys' school, and girls were first admitted in 1994. It is situated close to Burgh Heath in Surrey on a twelve-acre site. The school is managed by a charitable trust, which is administered by a board of governors. The current headmaster was appointed in September 2006.
- 1.2 The school aims to maximise the skills and abilities of every pupil, enabling them to realise their potential through a broad-based academic curriculum enriched by a programme of art, drama, music and sport, and to achieve academic excellence by providing the highest quality teaching. It strives: to provide a caring environment in which each pupil will be given individual and sensitive guidance; to develop an enthusiasm for learning and encourage self-discipline, confidence, self-esteem, self-motivated enquiry and personal responsibility; and to encourage pupils' understanding of and respect for others, both within the school and in the outside world, making a positive contribution as they move through life.
- 1.3 The original house around which the school is built comprises the administrative centre of the school. Various buildings have been added over the years to provide more modern and up-to-date facilities, including an assembly hall, dining hall, sports hall and indoor swimming pool. Playing fields are on the same site. The pre-preparatory department (called Pre-Prep), consisting of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and Years 1 and 2, is based in buildings around its own courtyard area. Years 3 to 8 are called the Main School. Since the last ISI inspection in 2003, the school has lowered the age at which it accepts children, taking them now from the age of two. The last Ofsted Nursery inspection was in January 2007.
- 1.4 At the time of the inspection, there were 250 pupils on roll. Of these, 65 were in the EYFS (an increase of 8 since the recent inspection of the EYFS setting), of whom 42 were part-time, 41 pupils were in Years 1 and 2, 104 were in Years 3 to 6, and 40 were in Years 7 and 8. Approximately five-eighths of pupils are boys. The results of standardised tests across the school indicate that the ability profile of the school is above the national average. If pupils perform in line with their abilities, their results in national tests at the ages of seven and eleven will be above the average for all maintained primary schools.
- 1.5 Most pupils come from professional or business families, living within a five-mile radius of the school. Approximately one in nine pupils come from an ethnic minority background, and four pupils do not have English as their principal language; however, none of these is at an early stage of learning English. The school has identified 75 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), and 55 of these receive specialist support for their learning. Their main difficulties are mild dyslexia, the development of literacy or numeracy skills, and self-esteem and confidence. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs.
- 1.6 On average, one-third of pupils leave at the end of Year 6 to begin their secondary schooling, passing examinations to join local maintained selective schools, although a few other pupils join the school at this stage. Of those who stay until the end of Year 8, the vast majority pass entrance examinations for local senior independent day schools, with a very small number going on to boarding schools across the country.

- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used for the Early Years Foundation Stage is shown in the following table.

Early Years Foundation Stage

School	Age of children
Pre-Nursery	2 to 3
Nursery	3 to 4
Transition	4 to 5

- 1.8 See Section 7 for the report on the Early Years Foundation Stage.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The quality of the educational experience provided is good and largely fulfils the school's aims, particularly that of providing a broad-based curriculum. Effective progress has been made since the last inspection, especially with the establishment of a 'skills for learning' department for those pupils with particular needs, and in the extension of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Children in the EYFS also receive a good quality educational experience, enabling them to develop well as learners.
- 2.2 The curriculum contributes positively to pupils' development in all areas of learning: linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative. Educational opportunities promote the acquisition of the skills of speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. In the Pre-Prep and Main School, the provision includes all National Curriculum subjects, with the addition of religious studies (RS), French from the age of three, Spanish from Year 5 and Latin in Years 6 to 8. Drama is taught as a discrete subject in the Pre-Prep, although all pupils participate in school productions and class assemblies. Design and technology (DT) from Year 3 is taught in single periods, which does not always allow pupils enough time to complete the task set.
- 2.3 Cross-curricular links are promoted well. For example in a Year 5 history lesson, the pupils who were acting as the Roman army were using commands in Latin, and, in a Year 4 trip, pupils linked mathematical problem-solving with Monet's art. From Year 5, pupils are set by ability for mathematics lessons and, as pupils move up through the school, subject specialist teaching increases.
- 2.4 Extra-curricular provision is outstanding and many pupils participate with enjoyment. A comprehensive range of clubs is organised, including sports and music, as well as interest clubs such as cooking, knitting and information and communication technology (ICT). In addition, involvement in debating, art, poetry and public-speaking competitions is popular with pupils. Throughout the school, an excellent variety of trips and visits enriches the curriculum, including a field trip to Norfolk, and theatre and art gallery excursions. Special events are organised, such as Poetry Week in the Main School, and St George's Day, Book Week, French Day and International Day in the Pre-Prep.
- 2.5 A good scheme of work in personal, social and health education (PSHE) reflects the school's aims and ethos, and includes appropriate guidance for pupils on sexual relationships, drugs awareness and internet safety.
- 2.6 The school pays careful attention to preparing pupils for the next stage of their education. New pupils are given 'buddies' to help them settle in, and Years 1 and 2 join the Main School for an assembly once a week. Staff liaise so that records and plans are shared for the transition from Years 2 to 3, and pupils already know some staff as they teach French, music and games, as well as skills for learning. Some pupils in Year 5 receive verbal and non-verbal reasoning support for their entrance examinations into schools which accept pupils at the age of 11. Year 8 pupils have interview practice and work is tailored to suit the requirements of their future schools' entrance examinations. 'Next Step' information booklets for their parents are very helpful. Visits from past pupils and the Elmslie Society, set up to enable older pupils to benefit from visiting speakers on a range of topics, also support pupils in Years 7 and 8. In particular the Aberdour Challenge encourages pupils from Years 6 to 8 to prepare for adult life and citizenship, with exciting challenges for individuals offering opportunities for responsibility, leadership and personal development.

- 2.7 The school is aware that the overall quality of curriculum planning is variable, with the best encompassing continuity from Years 1 to 8, rather than a split at the end of Pre-Prep, and including the opportunities that will be taken for assessment and how work will be matched to the needs of different pupils. The curriculum provides equality of access and opportunity for all pupils.
- 2.8 Identification of pupils requiring learning support is good and involves all staff and parents. Careful monitoring and planned intervention by the skills for learning department ensure that effective individual or group support is given. Individual education plans are gradually being introduced throughout the school. Helpful guidance regarding teaching strategies is given to staff and parents following discussion. The support for those pupils with LDD in the classroom is not consistent because not all teachers follow the guidance given. The school has identified those pupils who are gifted and talented and has begun to make extra-curricular provision through the Out of the Box thinking-skills club.
- 2.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.10 Pupils learn and achieve well in the EYFS, Pre-Prep and Main School. They develop in skills, knowledge and understanding of their academic subjects effectively, and these high standards of learning and achievement indicate that the school has made good progress since the last inspection. The creation of an appealing library has influenced pupils' enjoyment of reading. The provision of further challenge for the more able through clubs such as Out of the Box, and the support for those with LDD, have contributed to improved lesson planning. Responses from parents to the pre-inspection questionnaire agree that teaching is a major contributor in helping pupils to make progress.
- 2.11 Pupils' curiosity is generally encouraged and good examples of their critical and creative thinking were seen in lessons. In an ICT lesson, pupils developed their own computer game and in a DT lesson, they first designed and then built a model of their own bedroom. In a few lessons, pupils had no opportunity to think independently or reflect deeply because they were given insufficient time to do this or the teaching was too prescriptive. On these occasions, pupils did not make sufficient progress for their ability.
- 2.12 Pupils are confident and very articulate. They can clearly develop opinions and discuss well, showing their understanding. Listening skills are particularly strong in the Main School. Pupils read with fluency and expression and standards are high. Skills in writing are good, with examples of extended writing seen in several subjects across the curriculum. Effective numeracy skills were seen, for example in a lesson where the prime factors of larger numbers were investigated. Numeracy skills were also used well in other subjects, for instance in an English lesson when a pupil described a "symmetrical, colourful butterfly". Pupils' ICT skills are strong and are particularly developed well in subjects where staff have considerable interest and expertise.
- 2.13 No significant difference is apparent in the relative attainment of boys and girls, between different subjects or generally between different groups of pupils. However, in a few lessons, not all pupils were challenged at their own levels of ability because work was not appropriately matched to their needs.
- 2.14 Overall, pupils achieve well in relation to their abilities. Results in national tests at the age of seven, over the last three years for which comparative data is available, are well above the national average for all maintained primary schools. In national tests taken at the age of

eleven, results are far above the national average for all maintained primary schools, and this indicates that pupils' good achievement is sustained throughout their time at Aberdour.

- 2.15 A significant number of individual and team achievements are gained, and participation in these has a considerable impact on pupils' personal development, encouraging them to respect each other's talents and abilities, to work co-operatively and to develop team responsibility. Academically, twelve scholarships on average are won each year to senior schools, and almost all pupils gain places at the school of their choice. In 2007, five pupils who showed particular talent in ICT passed their GCSE the equivalent of three years early. Pupils achieve well in the Mathematics Challenge, gaining one Olympiad, eleven gold, six silver and eight bronze awards over the last two years. Sixty-eight pupils have taken and passed instrumental music examinations over the same period of time, with fifty-one of those at merit or distinction. In sport, a few pupils participate at a high county level in cricket, rugby and gymnastics, and some have been involved nationally in judo, horse-riding and gymnastics. In 2007, pupils were the Independent Association of Preparatory Schools champions in golf. Pupils in Year 8 have gained their first aid certificate, and school teams have recently won the local preparatory schools' competition in debating, as well as the Youth Speaks competition.
- 2.16 As pupils mature and move through the school, they independently research information and readily make notes, when given the opportunity. They develop competent study skills at every stage, and it is evident that the new library in the Main School is often used at break times for independent reading. Most pupils habitually organise their work neatly and take pride in its presentation; for example, in a Year 2 history lesson, pupils recorded their findings in a tabulated form accurately and with care.
- 2.17 In and out of lessons, pupils are considerate of the right of others to express opinions, and they work with partners or in small groups in a purposeful and calm manner. Successful group work occurs in many subjects and across all ages. In particular, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils shared ideas in pairs for converting fractions, percentages and decimals, enhancing their learning of this topic.
- 2.18 Throughout the school, pupils work consistently well, settling down purposefully at the start of lessons and single-mindedly applying themselves happily and with enjoyment to the tasks in hand. Behaviour is exemplary, and was only seen to slip on the very few occasions for younger pupils when the pace of the lesson or level of challenge was not suitable to the age or ability of the group.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.19 Pupils in the Pre-Prep and Main School demonstrate outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Personal development and well-being in the EYFS are of high quality. Children gain independence, and a variety of special events, visits and visitors widens their understanding of the world. The whole school fulfils its aims to encourage self-discipline, confidence, self-esteem and personal responsibility, and to encourage understanding of and respect for others, both inside the school and in the outside world, making a positive contribution as pupils move through -the school. The quality of personal development represents very good progress since the last inspection.
- 2.20 The spiritual awareness of pupils is good. Pupils participate fully in assemblies that promote a strong feeling of community; they listen attentively, contribute willingly and sing popular hymns well. They recognise that they are valued and express their feelings clearly. Their self-worth is encouraged in a number of ways: through the praise they are given by their teachers; the public recognition they enjoy when they receive awards for success in various

activities in assembly; and through seeing their work displayed around school. Art and music contribute to spiritual development by encouraging pupils to think about the beauty of the world in which they live, their feelings, and to explore their own creativity. Pupils were encouraged to reflect on the beauty of nature on display nearby.

- 2.21 Pupils realise that everyone is unique and they respect the values and beliefs of others. . Effective reflection between religion and the symbolism of light was seen in written work. Visitors to school sometimes provide an ‘awe and wonder’ moment; for example, staff recalled the gasp of pupils in seeing a peregrine falcon fly during the visit of the ‘Bird Man’ to school.
- 2.22 Moral development is excellent. Pupils have a well-developed sense of what is right and wrong. They treat each other with respect. When moving around school their consideration for all members of the community is exemplary. School provides many opportunities for pupils to show their care for each other and to understand and demonstrate good citizenship, particularly through PSHE lessons. From senior leadership downwards, the commitment to caring is clear, both within and beyond the school. Moral issues such as those concerned with the environment are explored in lessons, and evidence was seen in pupils’ work of discussions on topics concerning the sanctity of life.
- 2.23 Pupils’ social development is outstanding. Pupils of all ages relate positively to each other. Within the ethos of a family school, they accept that any pupil can help any other. Within school there are many ‘buddy’ systems which enable pupils to mentor each other, thereby developing their social skills and building self-confidence. The pupils of Year 3 take on responsibility for mentoring the Year 2 pupils about to move up and, during the Summer Term, there are mixed teaching sessions; elsewhere, confident readers work with less fluent readers. The elected school council contributes to enhancing the quality of community life.
- 2.24 Pupils have a good understanding of how institutions such as the House of Commons operate and visitors to school include those from public services. Ample opportunities are created to bring parts of the school together as a community. Assemblies, team games, concerts, clubs and form time all play their part. Pupils show a high level of courtesy. Older pupils have responsibilities, for example as head girl and head boy, monitors and prefects, and throughout the school, pupils have many opportunities to be class monitors; this is contrary to some responses from the pupils’ pre-inspection questionnaire. Pupils see this structure as a very positive way of working with staff for the good of the whole school community. The Aberdour residential visit enhances pupils’ social awareness and development. The senior pupils demonstrate outstanding maturity and understanding of human nature, for example in their writing.
- 2.25 Pupils’ cultural development is very strong. They develop a considerable appreciation of their own and others’ cultural values and experiences through music, art, geography, modern foreign languages, and visits to nearby museums and theatres. Teachers use incidental opportunities in lessons to celebrate diversity, as well as introducing pupils to the richness of other cultures. For example, senior pupils explore music from Japan and perform Gamelan music. Pupils learn of all the world’s major religions, beliefs and traditions in RS lessons. The varied ethnic mix of the school population promotes an understanding of these different cultures and the atmosphere within the school is happy and harmonious.
- 2.26 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.27 Teaching is of a good quality overall, and makes a positive contribution to the aims of maximising the skills and abilities of all pupils, and enabling them to realise their potential and to achieve academic excellence. It has improved since the last inspection and, whilst it is stronger in the most senior years, it is still inconsistent in quality across the school. A few instances of outstanding teaching were seen. Children's learning and development in the EYFS are supported well by adults with a thoroughly planned programme of activities.
- 2.28 In all subjects, teaching generally enables pupils of all abilities to make good progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally achieve as well as their peers because of the effective support they are given by specialist teachers, either individually or in small groups. Whilst teachers know their pupils very well and on several occasions showed a good understanding of their aptitudes and prior attainment, in the less successful lessons very little recognition of different abilities was seen in the tasks set. All pupils in a class were expected to do the same work, starting at the same point, irrespective of their ability. Where pupils were given tasks that were well matched to their different needs, they all made rapid progress in their learning.
- 2.29 Most lessons are well planned with activities that promote good achievement. For example, in a Year 4 geography lesson, pupils watched a short film presentation about the reclamation of a slate mine after a short explanation about how a pump storage power station works. The provision of a writing frame for those pupils who needed it and the quality of the interactions and questioning enabled successful learning for all. However, in some lessons, questioning did not challenge pupils at a higher level or was not open-ended enough, so restricting the achievement of those who were more able. Teachers have an appropriate knowledge of the subjects they teach and the enthusiasm of some is clearly evident in lessons. Their knowledge enables them to interact well with pupils, which develops pupils' understanding effectively in many different subjects.
- 2.30 Time is often well used, with a brisk pace to some lessons. Resources, including those for ICT, are good both in quantity and quality in all subjects and are used effectively to support pupils' learning. Teaching generally encourages pupils to apply themselves to their work very conscientiously and pupils enjoy having opportunities to use their ability to work and think for themselves. For example, in a Year 4 English lesson on forming an opinion, pupils selected key comments and articulated relevant points on the advantages and disadvantages of school uniform. However, the teaching in some lessons did not sufficiently promote this aspect of learning; little time was given for pupils to reflect on, or share, their ideas. In the Main School, teachers encourage excellent behaviour, and relationships, both in the classroom and around the school, are outstanding. This is not always the case in the Pre-Prep where, in a few lessons, pupils called out their answers and teachers responded, which did not encourage pupils to listen to each other or take turns by putting their hands up to answer. The programme of visits is wide ranging and contributes much to the quality of teaching and the educational experiences of the pupils.
- 2.31 Although there is a whole-school marking policy, it is inconsistently applied. Marking across the school is encouraging and gives praise, but it does not regularly offer advice on how to improve or set targets which focus on learning objectives. A few teachers mark with more rigour. Opportunities are taken in most lessons, through questioning and individual support, to find out how well pupils are developing their subject knowledge, skills and understanding, and this informs staff of the next steps in learning required.

- 2.32 A range of standardised tests, together with regular reading tests, gives valuable data on pupil performance. This is used to identify those who may need extra support with their learning. In mathematics, science, geography and ICT, assessment data is beginning to be used to monitor pupils' progress but this is not yet happening in all subjects. The school is aware of this and intends to extend this best practice across all subjects, to enable staff to check the progress of each individual pupil to ensure that they are all achieving as well as they can.
- 2.33 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care is outstanding and the school is highly effective in ensuring the welfare, health and safety of pupils. This fulfils the school's aims of providing a caring environment in which each pupil will be given individual and sensitive guidance. In the EYFS, children's welfare is fostered effectively. Good progress in pastoral care has been seen since the last inspection; PSHE has been more formalised, pastoral systems such as the mentoring system have improved and a school council has been formed.
- 3.2 Effective pastoral care arrangements are well established. It is clear that all staff are committed to the well-being of every pupil and want all to succeed both academically and personally. Teachers have a good overview of pupils' academic progress and personal development, and are well supported by the school's comprehensive policies and guidance. The pastoral structure includes regular daily contact between pupils and pastoral staff, including a ten-minute form period at the end of each day for Years 3 to 8. In Years 7 and 8, pupils have the opportunity to choose a staff mentor with whom they meet weekly to discuss pastoral matters and this is an outstanding feature of the quality of care. Three senior staff, the head of Pre-Prep and two deputy heads, particularly oversee the pastoral arrangements in the school and assist staff in the organisation of the pupils' care.
- 3.3 From the pupil pre-inspection questionnaire, it appeared that a very small minority of pupils felt they did not have an adult to turn to if they had a personal difficulty. Discussions with pupils indicated that this was not a widespread concern. Pupils are confident in the support structures available to them, and are happy to seek guidance from form tutors, the school nurse, the head of Pre-Prep, the deputy heads, the headmaster or any other members of staff if they are worried about anything. They are also aware of the 'rainbow box' situated in the school reception area where they are able to let the nurse know of a concern in confidence or anonymously. These arrangements enhance the positive and caring ethos of the school.
- 3.4 The exceptionally high quality of relationships amongst pupils and between staff and pupils is an important feature of life at Aberdour. Pupils are polite and courteous, as the school expects them to be. They feel trusted by the staff to behave well. Staff, who are good role models, treat pupils with respect and are interested in them. The 'buddy' system within the house structure encourages strong relationships between pupils of different ages and from different backgrounds. The provision of a 'friendship bench' in the Pre-Prep playground encourages social development. Parents are very appreciative of the standards of care and welfare, and comments in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated how well they believe the quality of care supports pupils' personal development.
- 3.5 Measures and policies to promote good behaviour are effective, and include the 'Aberdour Cares' poster, which offers guidelines on conduct, and the class 'pizza system' where, having gained enough green merit dots to fill up the 'pizza', the class are able to choose a class treat. These are evident in all form rooms, and pupils understand and accept the rewards and sanctions system. They view the school rules as fair. They say that bullying is rare but when it does occur they are confident that it will be dealt with constructively and quickly. Staff are aware of the procedure to take issues to senior management, and any issues about pupils causing concern are successfully communicated through the regular staff briefings and meetings, and are tracked through the pupil record.

- 3.6 The child protection policy and guidance are robust. Training is up-to-date for all staff at appropriate levels and a designated governor has responsibility for this area of the school's work. Secure and effective arrangements for safeguarding and promoting pupils' health and well-being are in place. The bursar is responsible for health and safety, and the health and safety committee meets termly. All risk assessments, for the school site, subjects and external visits, are completed. A medical room is available for those pupils who may become ill during the school day, supervised by full-time qualified nurses, and the care of pupils works extremely well. Staff are kept informed of the medical needs of their pupils and a school medical officer acts in an advisory capacity. Any accidents are carefully recorded.
- 3.7 Good measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken; fire drills are undertaken and logged at least termly and there is a detailed fire risk assessment. All fire and electrical equipment is regularly tested. The admissions and attendance registers are maintained correctly. The school has an accessibility plan that is in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.
- 3.8 The school ensures that pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and take regular exercise. It gained the Healthy Schools Award because it encourages a healthy lifestyle for all. Pupils have a suitable choice of healthy and nutritious options for lunch and catering staff are fully aware of any special dietary requirements. Pupils are encouraged to take frequent exercise through the physical education programme that includes regular swimming and cross-country sessions.
- 3.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.10 Links with parents and the community are outstanding. The school has developed this partnership extremely well so it is an effective contributing factor to the outstanding well-being of its pupils. These links offer opportunities to encourage understanding and respect for others, which fulfils the aims of the school. The headmaster is at the forefront of promoting an open and accessible culture where parents feel welcome. Since the last inspection very good progress has been made, particularly in the areas of the provision of a complaints policy, provision of information about progress and links with the local community.
- 3.11 In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents indicated that they were overwhelmingly positive about nearly all aspects of school life. They were particularly pleased with the curriculum provided, and the help and guidance offered to their children, the teaching, and the belief that the school promotes worthwhile attitudes and values. They were also very happy about the opportunities they have to be involved in the life and work of the school. Inspectors agree with these positive views. A very few parents were less satisfied about the homework provided, generally feeling that too much was given. The inspection team judged that homework was fair and that these concerns were unfounded. Pupils, too, expressed overall satisfaction with the amount of homework expected.
- 3.12 Parents have many opportunities to be involved in school activities, and in the work and progress of their children. In the EYFS, staff work closely with parents to link learning at home and at school, and excellent information is provided. In the rest of the school, regular parents' meetings run throughout the year and parents are given every opportunity to meet with teachers in between these times. Reading and homework diaries can be used as message books and are an important daily support for contact between home and school. Parents are encouraged to be involved through a range of social and fund-raising events. The parents'

association runs a 'coffee shop' on site, offering both morning and afternoon opening times. This is a clear strength of the parent community and is extremely well used. It supports very well the open door policy of the school and its desire for an effective partnership. The parents' association has raised considerable funds for a variety of school initiatives, including raised garden beds, tennis nets, the hard play area and refurbishment of the school swimming pool. Over £15,000 has been raised in the last year through events such as the bonfire celebrations and the Summer Fete. Parents also support the school on trips, at matches, attending class assemblies and by coming into school to share their interests or expertise with pupils.

- 3.13 New parents to the school are made very welcome. Information prior to pupils joining and for current parents is comprehensive and relevant. Weekly newsletters, an annual school magazine and an informative website all keep parents up-to-date on events and achievements. Information about children's work and progress is shared with parents through bi-annual reports. The best of these offer a clear picture of their children's attainment, effort and progress, and set targets for the future.
- 3.14 The school handles the concerns of parents with due care and all parents are made aware of the complaints procedure. The headmaster in particular deals quickly with potential difficulties so that they are resolved at an early stage. His visibility and accessibility, greeting parents and their children almost every day, are outstanding features of this effective partnership, and parents appreciate his ready availability for discussion.
- 3.15 The school is developing positive links with the wider community. Active links to a local trust for children with brain injury are forged through visits and charitable fund-raising. Local speakers and past pupils attend school to talk on various topics through the Elmslie Society. The school participates in poetry and art festivals, and supports a variety of charities through the house system. Other local children, a nearby church, sports clubs and a choir use the school's facilities. Links with a local primary school are also being forged, with the intention of promoting a stronger sense of community for both staff and pupils.
- 3.16 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Effective governance enables the school to fulfil its aim of providing a caring environment in which pupils develop an enthusiasm for learning, and an understanding of and respect for others. The quality of governance has improved significantly since the last inspection, especially in the closer oversight by governors of the school's educational development.
- 4.2 The governors, each with their own role, operate within four committees: finance and general purposes, bursaries, education, and health and safety, all of which meet at least termly. This structure enables them to have a clear view of the different areas of school life, as well as sharing more evenly the workload of governance. In particular, the full governing body regularly focuses on important welfare issues concerning health and safety, and child protection, and they carry out their responsibilities in these areas successfully. Several governors have undertaken recent training, endeavouring to keep themselves up-to-date on key issues. Their control of finances is strong, and they make good provision for accommodation, staffing and resources. Their insight into school life is not only through the regular reports of the headmaster and bursar, but also through the opportunity taken by several governors to visit the school regularly, either to discuss finance, monitor the premises or visit classrooms, observing the work of the school at first hand. The chairman of governors keeps in very close contact with the headmaster and staff, and also with the parents' association, reporting back to their committee after each full governors' meeting. After a gap of a few terms, the governing body has begun again to invite staff to attend its meetings to update governors on the progress of individual subjects or departments. Through their awareness of the school development plan, the governors are able to support and challenge the headmaster and staff, giving suitable stimulus for driving forward necessary change.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.3 The school is led and managed strongly and effectively, enabling the school's aims to be broadly met. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in all areas and at all levels of leadership and management. This progress has been driven forward in recent years by the headmaster, who has overhauled and restructured many aspects of school life in his relatively short time at the school, in order to raise the quality of the educational experience and care provided. The EYFS setting is also well led and managed.
- 4.4 The senior management team, consisting of three deputy heads, the head of Pre-Prep, the marketing director and the bursar, gives the headmaster good support. Strong and positive leadership, which manifests itself in understanding the needs of individual pupils, is focused very effectively, and is reflected in the good quality of education and the outstanding care of the pupils, to which all staff, including those who are non-teaching, give excellent support. Senior managers, under his leadership, provide sound educational direction on a day-to-day basis, but their roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined and overlap in some important areas, such as assessment or timetabling, and the school has recognised the difficulties this presents. The pro-active approach of leadership in developing the school means that much has been achieved in recent months. A well-written strategic plan focuses on school improvement over a three-year period. This in turn has been prioritised to focus on the key issues for the current stage of the school's development. The school knows itself well, and has given strong consideration to pupils' outcomes as its first priority. The only aspect of the plan which is unclear is the cost of the actions to be taken, which in turn makes

it more difficult for the governors to decide how much of the plan can be supported at any one time.

- 4.5 Since the last inspection, middle managers have more clearly defined roles. Some, but not all, have approached their increased responsibilities with determination, and are undertaking the monitoring of teaching and learning with enthusiasm. However, the school is aware that the approach is not yet sufficiently rigorous across all subjects to have an impact on pupils' achievement. Whilst heads of department in the Main School and co-ordinators in the Pre-Prep meet together regularly, the division in subject management between the two sections of the school means that it is difficult for heads of department to have a full overview of their subject across the whole school. Policies and procedures are reviewed regularly, and outcomes for pupils are discussed in staff meetings so that any issues can be resolved as soon as possible. This also means that the effectiveness of implementation can be checked and processes can be amended as appropriate.
- 4.6 Staff provide a wide range of expertise and experience, and are generally deployed well. Recruitment procedures are robust and all checks, including those with the Criminal Records Bureau, are carried out efficiently, and a centralised register is kept accurately. Induction for new staff is suitable, and is particularly well organised for newly qualified teachers. These members of staff say that they are extremely well supported in their early professional development and great care is taken over their induction training. Opportunities given for in-service training are suitable, with in-house courses being regularly arranged. Whilst an appraisal scheme was set up after the last inspection and is currently operating, it is not sufficiently rigorous or formalised. It is currently being reviewed for amendment in the very near future.
- 4.7 Financial management is strong and so the needs of pupils are well met. Resources are good, regarding textbooks, and ICT software and equipment. The library is well stocked and managed efficiently. Some opportunities are available for pupils to use it for independent research, contributing positively to their learning. The accommodation is overall of good quality and includes some outstanding features, such as the superb swimming pool and sports hall. Extensive grounds, including playing fields on site, make an exceptional contribution to educational and recreational play.
- 4.8 The administration of the school is carried out very efficiently, and communication within the school and with parents is very strong. All ancillary staff make a positive contribution to the school's happy atmosphere and ethos. Pupils are clearly proud of their school.
- 4.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.10 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 Aberdour Preparatory School largely fulfils its aims and meets the needs of its pupils well, in the EYFS, the Pre-Prep and the Main School. The highly effective leadership of the headmaster, ably supported by the governors, ensures that pupils are provided with a caring environment in which they can develop an enthusiasm for learning, and in which self-discipline, confidence, self-esteem, self-motivated enquiry and personal responsibility are encouraged. The personal development of pupils is outstanding, and this is underpinned by the excellent pastoral care provided by all staff, teaching and non-teaching, throughout the school. Pupils learn and achieve well because their attitudes to learning and their behaviour are exemplary, relationships are very strong, and because teaching is effective overall. Extra-curricular activities, exceedingly well supported by pupils, and visits that enrich the curriculum are extremely good. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the educational experience and the care provided for their children. Pupils are unfailingly courteous, friendly and happy at school.
- 5.2 Overall, very good progress, covering many aspects of the school's work and life, has been made since the last inspection. In particular, the quality and organisation of the curriculum, provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the effectiveness of the governors have all substantially improved. In addition, an appraisal system is now in place. The school is aware that teaching is still inconsistent in quality overall, together with marking and the current process of assessment. It also recognises that the roles and responsibilities of senior managers are not clearly defined, and that the monitoring of teaching and learning is not rigorous enough. The school development plan is focused on these areas for improvement.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 In order to further improve the quality of its provision, the school should take the following action.
1. Reduce inconsistencies in teaching and marking by rigorously monitoring the quality of:
 - planning, ensuring that all pupils are challenged at their appropriate levels to achieve as much as they can;
 - learning, through examining pupils' books regularly and thoroughly;
 - teaching, through lesson observation and the sharing of best practice currently in the school.
 2. Define more clearly the roles and responsibilities of the senior management team.
 3. Fully develop the process of assessment being used in mathematics, science, geography and ICT to cover all subjects, so that individual learning targets can be set and pupils' achievements can be raised further.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.
- 5.6 Any failures to meet EYFS requirements are detailed in Section 7.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 27th to 30th April 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 governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.
- 6.2 The Early Years Foundation Stage was inspected on 19th and 20th January 2009 by two inspectors. The inspectors observed sessions, talked to the children, examined samples of work, and held discussions with staff and governors. Comments from parents and carers were considered, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mrs Elizabeth Coley	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Susan Bailes	Head, IAPS school
Mr Richard Cross	Deputy Head, IAPS school
Mrs Elizabeth Garner	Head, IAPS school
Mrs Audrey Marsden	Head of Pre-Preparatory School, IAPS school
Mrs Joy Richardson	Early Years Lead Inspector
Mrs Rosamund Walwyn	Early Years Team Inspector

7. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE (EYFS)

- 7.1 The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) forms part of the Pre-Prep department of Aberdour Preparatory School. It has twenty-one children in two Reception classes, known as Transition, and 36 children in the Beehive Nursery, including eleven in the Pre-Nursery which is registered with Ofsted for the care of two year olds. These youngest children attend on selected mornings. Three and four year olds in the Nursery attend part-time, or may build up to full-time before they join Transition in the September following their fourth birthday. The setting aims to provide a caring, safe and stimulating environment, encouraging children to reach their full potential, and to develop understanding and respect for others. It was previously inspected by Ofsted in January 2007. Since then, it has continued to improve its provision, and has taken effective action to develop its written policies and make these available to parents.
- 7.2 The setting provides good quality education and care so that children develop well as individuals and as learners. Children settle in happily, join in confidently and gain a zest for learning. From the Pre-Nursery onwards, each child is known and nurtured as a unique individual, in close liaison with parents, and this is a notable strength. Great care is taken to secure children's health, safety and welfare. The setting is led and managed well so that staff work together effectively, ensuring that children thrive. The setting is largely successful in meeting its aims, and is developing its own evaluation of how to improve further.
- 7.3 Children achieve well. They start with skills that are generally well developed for their age and make good progress in building on these throughout the EYFS. As a result, they successfully reach, and most exceed, the goals set nationally for the end of this stage. Foundations are well laid in reading, including the use of phonics, and in counting and calculating. Children learn to use technology, including computers and digital cameras. They speak and listen well. They regularly have their say in a small group, and become confident and articulate as a result. Children explain clearly, and question each other with interest, as seen in 'show and tell' sessions in Transition about special objects brought from home. Staff observe and assess with thoughtful care what children know, understand and can do. 'Learning stories' and scrapbooks passed between home and school provide a record of children's learning. Systems are being developed to track the pace of progress over time relative to each child's starting point.
- 7.4 Personal development is good. Children are strongly supported by clear routines, such as finding their name when they come into the Nursery. They learn to join in, share and take turns. Children gain independence, for example through being shown how to clean up after a spill, so that they can then do it on their own. Children enjoy imaginative play, as in the Nursery when they were captivated by 'puppet play' with 'jungle animals'. However, the indoor activities provided do not always sufficiently absorb and challenge children so that they sustain interest and pursue their own ideas. Active learning is much enjoyed, as when the children in the Pre-Nursery picked out the picture of 'a hopping animal' and all moved around the room like kangaroos, with much delight. In Transition, mathematical learning came to life when children physically arranged themselves into sets. On occasions, however, children are expected to sit and listen passively for too long.
- 7.5 A variety of special events, visits and visitors widens children's understanding of the world. Children learn to keep safe, discussing, for example, how to cope if the playground is slippery. They eat healthily, enjoying a hot, cooked meal together at lunchtime. They relish the fruit snacks that are readily available, with milk and water, each day. Children learn to

co-operate with others, for example through having a 'buddy' each day as a partner for their play in the Nursery, and helping to tidy up.

- 7.6 The setting promotes children's learning and development well. The programme is thoroughly planned to include all the areas of learning. Children have appropriate opportunity to choose their own activities, though these are not always imaginatively resourced to maximise learning. An attractive outdoor play area, recently enhanced with an awning, is well equipped for play and exploration, and is generally effectively used to support and extend the children's learning. The setting's aim to provide a stimulating environment is less fully reflected in use of the indoor space. Staff work closely with parents to link learning at home and at school, and children benefit greatly from this.
- 7.7 Children's welfare is fostered effectively and there are significant strengths in the school's arrangements. The setting has robust policies and procedures to safeguard children, to ensure their health and safety, and to minimise risks. Each child has a 'key person' to oversee their care, and this is particularly effective in the Pre-Nursery in helping children to settle and to feel secure. The staff manage children's behaviour well and the children know what is expected of them, and why. The setting provides excellent information for parents, as in a regular letter to explain the work planned in Nursery and how children can be helped to become more independent.
- 7.8 The setting is well led and managed. The staff are suitably qualified and experienced, and work well together to meet the children's needs. The setting runs smoothly and communication is good. Parents' views are listened to and taken into account. The school's twice daily 'coffee shop' provides a valued meeting place for parents. The staff are highly committed to serving the needs of children and have been involved recently in taking stock of how well the setting is doing. The setting recognises that processes for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning, sharing good practice and planning for improvement are not yet fully developed.

What the Setting Should Do to Improve

- 7.9 To build on its strengths and further improve the good quality of its provision, the setting should:
1. share and strengthen good practice by consistently monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and learning, evaluating what works well and what could be better;
 2. develop the use of the indoor space to provide a more stimulating environment, and ensure that activities are designed and resourced to sustain interest and extend learning.
- 7.10 The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Childcare Act 2006.

Complaints Since the Last Inspection

- 7.11 Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required any action to meet national requirements.