

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Claires Court Schools

Full Name of the School	Claires Court Schools
DCSF Number	868/6014
Registered Charity Number	N/A
Address	1 College Avenue, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 6AW.
Telephone Number	01628 411480
Fax Number	01628 411467
Email Address	head@clairescourt.co.uk
Principals	Mr James Wilding and Mr Hugh Wilding
Proprietor	Claires Court Schools Ltd
Age Range	2 to 18
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	11th to 14th February 2008

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

The 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.....	5
	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils	7
	The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment).....	10
3.	THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS	13
	The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils.....	13
	The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community	15
4.	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT	17
	The Quality of Governance	17
	The Quality of Leadership and Management	17
5.	CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS.....	20
	Overall Conclusions	20
	Next Steps.....	20
6.	SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE	21
	List of Inspectors	21

1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 The school began its life in 1960 as a boys' proprietorial Catholic preparatory school, with a boarding house, run by the current proprietors' parents. The school flourished, but the demand for boarding declined. In 1975 the boarding accommodation, Ridgeway, became the boys' preparatory school, now accommodating four to eleven year olds, and a senior department for boys up to the age of sixteen was established on the Claires Court site. In 1993 the Maidenhead College for Girls, today called The College, was purchased, providing Claires Court Schools with a co-educational nursery and a girls' school for four to sixteen year olds. A co-educational sixth form was opened in 1994, mainly on the College site, extending the age range from three to eighteen. The three establishments are now known as Claires Court Schools.
- 1.2 The school has 965 pupils aged 4 to 18, and 91 pupils in the nursery attending full or part-time. There are significantly larger numbers of boys at Ridgeway and Claires Court than there are girls at the College in the relevant age groups.
- 1.3 The principals, since 1985, are the proprietors of the school and lead the academic and administrative functions respectively. In 1999 the ownership and control of the various sites was consolidated into Claires Court Schools Ltd.
- 1.4 Pupils come from families where parents are usually in business or professional occupations. They live in Maidenhead and the surrounding small towns and villages of Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire. The great majority are of white British heritage. Over a fifth of families receive some type of financial support from the school. The school has no formal entry tests or examinations at any age and pupils are admitted as a result of interviews and previous school reports.
- 1.5 The academic capabilities of pupils vary considerably in different age phases in the school and between different age groups, but can be categorised broadly as above the national average for maintained primary and secondary schools up to sixteen years old. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, they would achieve results that are above the national average for maintained primary and secondary schools. Ridgeway has the highest number of very able pupils and Claires Court and College Seniors the lowest number, because many able pupils transfer to state grammar schools at age eleven. At sixteen the school again loses some more of its ablest pupils to state grammar schools, but this is a reducing trend. In the sixth form, the ability profile is in line with the average for pupils in maintained secondary schools, itself a selective group, with girls' profile somewhat higher than that of the boys.
- 1.6 A relatively large number of pupils have been identified with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD); 368 in all, of whom 142 receive specialist learning support, most commonly for types of dyslexia. The school also has a very small number of pupils with statements of educational need and for whom English is not their principal language.
- 1.7 The aims of the school are: to provide a modern and relevant education; to instil and promote a life-long love of learning; to equip pupils with skills for life-academic, musical, creative, aesthetic, sporting and social; to promote the spiritual development and moral welfare of each individual; to generate an understanding of the need for care and consideration of others within our community and the wider world; and to work in partnership with parents and guardians to help pupils achieve their full potential.

- 1.8 Under-pinning these aims are a set of values identified by staff and pupils, which the school seeks to inculcate in its pupils in order to guide them through school and adult life. These are: responsibility for ourselves, respect for others, loyalty to the school and personal integrity.
- 1.9 In 2000 the school ceased to be a denominational school, although its aims and education continue to be informed by Christian values. It has grown in size considerably, and has about a fifth more pupils than at the time of the last inspection, but the composition of the school has changed. Ridgeway has about the same number of boys, but numbers in the Nursery and College Juniors have declined, reflecting demographic trends. College Seniors has almost doubled in size, whilst Claire's Court has about a fifth more boys and the sixth form has also increased in size by about a fifth.
- 1.10 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The school provides a good education for its pupils across the age range that is consistent with its aims and values. Pupils gain a broad educational experience, which gives them plentiful opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in a wide variety of contexts. The anomalies noted at the time of the last inspection, related to differences in foreign languages provision, have largely disappeared. The planning of the curriculum is thorough and is particularly good in catering for the needs of pupils with LDD and the very small number with statements of special educational need.
- 2.2 Extra-curricular activities, educational visits and trips enrich and extend pupils' educational experience very significantly, as they did at the time of the last inspection. Personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is now taught across the full age-range up to Year 11, which was not so at the time of the last inspection, but shortage of time limits opportunities for extended discussion of important issues.

Ridgeway, College Juniors and the Nursery

- 2.3 In the Nursery, the curriculum is integrated around the Early Years Foundation curriculum's six areas of learning, working successfully towards the Early Learning Goals.
- 2.4 The College Juniors and Ridgeway curriculum is founded on an enhanced National Curriculum model, which provides a broad and varied educational experience. French is introduced during Reception and Latin in Year 5. Religious education (RE) is taught in all year groups, but shares time with PSHCE from Year 3 onwards, allowing only adequate time for either subject. The strong emphasis on English and mathematics ensures that the curriculum makes an excellent contribution to pupils' linguistic and mathematical development. They quickly acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills and continue to develop them well throughout the junior years, as they do their listening and speaking skills.
- 2.5 The curriculum makes a strong contribution to aesthetic, creative and physical development, partly through the formal curriculum, but also through extra-curricular activities that are particularly strong in games and music, attracting wide-spread participation by pupils. Scientific development is provided with a strong base in science and benefits from specialist teaching in the later years. Technological development takes place through design and technology, information and communications technology (ICT) and art. The curriculum makes a strong contribution to human and social development through geography, history, English, sport, educational visits and residential programmes for older pupils, which provide excellent opportunities for them to show initiative, work in groups and take on responsibility.
- 2.6 Curricular planning is thorough, well organised and ensures that all pupils have access to the full range of educational experiences, whilst encouraging continuity and progression in learning. Arrangements to support pupils with LDD and those few with English as an additional language (EAL) needs are particularly well organised, and include the close tracking of progress in their learning. At College, this quality of planning represents a considerable improvement from the last inspection. Joint planning of the curriculum by Ridgeway and College is now well integrated, ensuring an overall commonality of educational experience that was not so at the time of the last inspection.

- 2.7 The curriculum is enriched greatly by the large range of activities in which pupils take part. This is a particularly strong feature at Ridgeway, where many pupils are involved in sport, musical activities and chess; at College Juniors sport and music also feature strongly. In addition, the various educational visits and residential programmes, often conducted jointly, make a valuable contribution.
- 2.8 Both Ridgeway and College Juniors have comprehensive, well-organised arrangements for the transfer of pupils into the two senior schools, with close liaison between the relevant staff and detailed records, pastoral and academic to pass on.

Claires Court, College Seniors and Sixth Form

- 2.9 The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 at Claires Court and College is broad and follows an enhanced National Curriculum model. At College, it has an emphasis on aesthetic and creative education, providing particularly good opportunities for development in these areas. The Claires Court curriculum has more emphasis on physical education, providing particularly well for physical development. The curriculum makes a good contribution to linguistic, mathematical, scientific, human, physical, aesthetic and creative development and a sound contribution to technological development, but the lack of food technology for boys and design and technology for girls limits the range of their experience. This anomaly is being addressed in the near future as a result of the planned building programme.
- 2.10 Literacy and numeracy are promoted well through English, foreign languages and mathematics, with opportunities in other subjects, such as history, geography and science, to make valuable contributions. Pupils develop good listening and speaking skills, partly through the encouragement of discussion and presentations in many subjects.
- 2.11 In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum offers a judicious mix of a common core of subjects that all pupils study, although this does not include religious education, alongside a wide variety of option choices. This arrangement allows pupils to combine a broad educational experience with the flexibility to address personal needs and interests.
- 2.12 The programme for PSHCE is comprehensive and appropriate, although it lacks a strong focus on developing an understanding of British political institutions and their workings. Time to carry out this programme remains constrained and leaves relatively little time for the extended discussion of key moral and social issues.
- 2.13 In the sixth form, the school provides a large and varied number of subjects for pupils to study at AS and A level. In addition, pupils take part in a physical education activity of their own choice and provide support in classes and activities ranging from Nursery through to Year 11. The school currently has no formal programme of PSHCE for sixth formers, but the new head of sixth form is reviewing the situation.
- 2.14 The curriculum is enriched greatly by the wide range of activities in which pupils are involved. These include visits to art galleries, museums, theatres, places of worship for a number of religions and field trips to places of geographical and historical interest. A large number of curriculum-related overseas trips are organised for older pupils, which enhance their subject knowledge and their cultural understanding. Extra-curricular activities in sport particularly enrich the experience of many boys and girls, and high levels of participation in extra-curricular music at College enrich girls' musical experience.
- 2.15 Curriculum planning is thorough and appropriate. Planning for pupils with LDD and statements of special educational need is particularly good, with clear statements of the relevant problem, helpful suggestions to teachers about how they can plan to address it and

clear arrangements for monitoring progress. Planning to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils is often done well, but occasionally insufficient attention is paid to this small group.

- 2.16 Careers education and guidance is of a good quality and benefits from the support and input of an experienced careers officer. All Year 11 pupils do work experience and Year 12 are strongly encouraged to do so, with about two-thirds taking up the option. In the sixth form pupils receive helpful support in making their higher education choices and are strongly encouraged to visit universities they have applied to. The various activities in which pupils engage between Years 9 and 13 ensure that they are well prepared for the next stages in their future life.

Whole school

- 2.17 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.18 Pupils demonstrate good knowledge and skills in their academic work, which they pursue with diligence and enthusiasm, particularly amongst younger pupils. Differences in relative attainment between different groups are small and pupils with LDD and statements of educational need achieve particularly well, relative to their abilities. Increasingly, as they grow older, pupils demonstrate a good capacity to think through ideas and processes, learn how to organise their work and to work very effectively independently and collaboratively. Achievement outside the classroom is impressive, both at the individual and team level.
- 2.19 The school is successful in encouraging a love of learning in its pupils and in equipping them with valuable life skills, both key school aims. Pupils' learning and achievement continue to be good in relation to their abilities, as at the time of the last inspection.

Ridgeway, College Juniors and the Nursery

- 2.20 Pupils develop a good knowledge and understanding of the subjects that they study and learn how to apply their subject knowledge effectively and think critically.
- 2.21 In the Nursery and Reception classes at College and Ridgeway, pupils make good progress across the six areas of learning towards the Early Learning Goals, as witnessed in work on an integrated topic on traditional tales, that covered all six areas of learning; in this, pupils achieved standards of work that were consistently at least good for their abilities. By Year 1, pupils talk with confidence and clarity, listen carefully and respond well to instructions, and work well on their own and in groups. They settle quickly to tasks and clearly enjoy what they do.
- 2.22 All pupils make consistently good progress across Years 1 to 6, as illustrated in a Year 4 science lesson, where girls demonstrated an impressive understanding of the electrical process that produces light in torches, and by the high quality of imaginative writing produced by Year 5 boys, drawing on Aesop's use of animals to illustrate morals. Various examples were noted, in lessons and in the work scrutiny, of pupils thinking and acting critically and creatively.
- 2.23 Particular attention is paid to the needs of pupils with LDD and EAL and these pupils make especially good progress as a result of this.

- 2.24 Results in the national tests for seven and eleven year olds are consistent with other inspection evidence. Boys aged seven obtain results that are far above the national average for all maintained primary schools, girls achieve results that are well above the national average. In both instances, this represents good achievement in relation to their average abilities. Both Ridgeway and College Juniors year groups increase in size significantly between the ages of seven and eleven. This broadens the ability range of the boys significantly, so that both boys and girls are now of above average ability. At age eleven, both boys and girls obtain results that are well above the national average for maintained primary schools and which are good in relation to their abilities, particularly for pupils with LDD.
- 2.25 An important feature of pupils' achievements at Ridgeway and College Juniors is the great success achieved by individuals and teams. The boys regularly reach the finals of the National Schools Rugby tournament and the Independent Schools Association (ISA) National Athletics finals. In chess they have won silver and bronze medals at the English Primary Schools Chess Association Nationals competition and individual gold and silver medals at the Marlow Music Festival. The girls, with a much smaller age cohort, achieve success in regional athletics competitions and netball tournaments, together with some impressive results in music examinations for instrumental players.
- 2.26 Pupils are articulate for their age and listen, read and write well. They have a good grasp of mathematical concepts and can apply these effectively when given the opportunity. They become increasingly competent and confident users of ICT.
- 2.27 Great diligence and enthusiasm for their work are common features demonstrated by boys and girls. They settle quickly to work, show themselves able and willing to think for themselves, and work very well independently and collaboratively in groups.

College Seniors, Claire's Court and Sixth Form

- 2.28 Pupils achieve a good grounding in the knowledge, understanding and skills of the subjects that they study and demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively about what they are studying. This good grounding makes a significant contribution to the considerable success achieved in other activities.
- 2.29 Few differences exist in the attainment of particular groups of pupils. Those identified with LDD, and the few with EAL and special educational needs, often do especially well. Girls achieve particularly well in science, the aesthetic and creative areas, foreign languages and physical education; the boys in science, foreign languages and physical education.
- 2.30 Pupils achieve well in relation to their abilities in the national tests for fourteen year olds and at GCSE level, with results that are well above the national average for all maintained schools. The various standardised assessments used by the school to monitor pupils' progress indicate that this is consistently good, and particularly so for those with LDD and EAL needs. These measures also indicate that the academic profile of boys is a little lower than that for girls in the school, which is reflected in the GCSE results. The results from test results and GCSE examinations very much reflect the inspection evidence of current achievement and progress by pupils.
- 2.31 In the sixth form, pupils continue to demonstrate a good grounding in their subjects and make good progress across the full ability range in developing relevant knowledge and skills; both boys and girls.

- 2.32 The analysis of A-level results over the last few years indicate that girls achieve at above the national average for all maintained schools and that boys achieve in line with the national average. This difference largely reflects the better qualifications of girls entering the sixth form. Standardised measurements indicate that pupils have made good progress from GCSE to A level overall during the last few years. The inspection evidence about pupils' achievement and progress suggests that, at this stage of their courses, they are achieving well and making good progress.
- 2.33 One of the features of the senior schools is the level of individual and team success, which is outstanding given their size. The largest number of individual and team successes has taken place in sport; for instance, pupils have been selected for the Great Britain Junior Boys Rowing team and the Under 18 Girls England South hockey team. Individuals and teams achieve regular success in the national ISA athletics, netball and rugby sevens championships and the girls came fourth in the Under 16 England South championship last year. A feature of sporting activities is the high levels of participation by boys and girls, so that nearly half the boys are playing for rugby teams, for instance. This reflects the inclusive ethos of the school well.
- 2.34 In other activities, pupils have also achieved some notable successes. One pupil achieved one of the top ten marks in GCSE textiles this year and pupils' work is regularly exhibited at local Arts festivals, whilst they frequently win ISA regional and national competitions in art and drama. Many pupils gain success in music, drama and public speaking examinations. Considerable numbers also achieve awards in the Junior Outdoor Pursuits and Duke of Edinburgh's Award schemes at various levels.
- 2.35 Pupils express themselves well and with increasing sophistication, both orally and in writing. They demonstrate increasing technical accuracy and the capacity to use a number of genres effectively, such as analytical and imaginative writing. They listen attentively to teachers in the great majority of lessons, settle quickly and apply themselves diligently and with considerable enthusiasm to tasks set in class and for homework. When given the opportunity, they work well independently and make effective use of ICT, particularly word-processing and the internet for research purposes. They usually collaborate well and can develop cogent arguments when asked to do so, as in a Year 11 food technology lesson where pupils deduced the effect of position in a refrigerator on the propensity of food to freeze or thaw.
- 2.36 Mathematical concepts and skills are developed well and pupils have opportunities to apply their skills in various subjects, such as geography, history and science. Pupils make effective use of ICT in a number of contexts.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.37 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good overall and outstanding in relation to moral and social development. The school meets its aims in this area of its provision more than successfully and has built further on its good provision at the time of the last inspection.

Ridgeway, College Juniors and the Nursery

- 2.38 From a very early age in the Nursery, pupils learn the importance of courtesy, kindness, respect for others and cooperation, laying a very firm foundation for later spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- 2.39 During their years at Ridgeway and College Juniors, pupils make excellent progress in their moral and social development and good progress in their spiritual and cultural development. Pupils develop a clear sense of right and wrong and recognise the need for rules and sanctions. They learn self control and tolerance in their relationships with others, which is reflected in the harmonious manner in which they work and play with each other. In this, they also learn from the good role models that staff present. Pupils also learn to value their relatively privileged position and recognise the need to support those less fortunate, through topics in assembly and the extensive fund-raising for charities in which pupils and their families are involved.
- 2.40 Pupils make rapid progress in their social development, influenced by high expectations of their behaviour, including behaving responsibly and courteously towards each other and staff. As one pupil in Year 6 put it, 'it is important to share views in order to learn from each other'. They recognise the importance of caring for one another and are supportive when their peers are upset or do not succeed at a task. They are eager to take on responsibility and pupils gain much from the various residential experiences that they have, culminating in the week long field trip in Year 6.
- 2.41 Spiritual development is good and pupils develop a strong sense of self worth and personal esteem, as a result of the ethos of a caring and achieving community that staff have created, and the enthusiasm that teachers bring to their teaching. Art and music provide good opportunities for pupils to experience joy and wonder. Assemblies also contribute to spiritual development, as in a discussion about whether it was more important to have an inner sense of goodness and beauty or to be physically beautiful. Religious education makes a contribution, but shortage of time precludes much exploration of the spiritual dimension of religions.
- 2.42 The cultural development of pupils is also good. They find out about the local community through visits from police officers and others, as well as through trips and excursions. They learn about different cultures in time and place in history and geography and about the various festivals of the major religions in RE and assemblies, as well as experiencing different musical traditions in music. Fund-raising for charities also extends their understanding of problems and issues facing many cultures in the world.

Claire's Court, College Seniors and Sixth Form

- 2.43 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils mirrors that of the junior departments. Moral and social development are considerable strengths and spiritual and cultural development are less strong, but remain good overall.
- 2.44 Central to the educational philosophy of the school is the need to treat everyone as a valued individual, and this guides relationships between staff and pupils and amongst pupils. It has helped to create harmonious communities, under-pinned by the school's values of responsibility for ourselves, respect for others, loyalty and integrity. Pupils continue to consolidate their understanding of right and wrong, but now extend their consideration of issues such as inequality, lack of social justice and the effects of global warming, through work they do in subjects such as geography, history and English, as well as assemblies and the extensive work that they under-take for charities.
- 2.45 Pupils continue to make excellent progress in their social development. They accept responsibility for their behaviour from early in their senior school careers and are keen to take on responsibilities. The school provides plentiful opportunities for this. Every tutor group has a form captain and each tutor group elects a representative to the school council, which acts as an effective conduit for pupils' views. The many sporting and other activities

that the school runs provide opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles. The Junior Outward Pursuits and Duke of Edinburgh's Awards are popular and encourage altruism, individual responsibility and service in the community. In Year 11, pupils take on responsibilities for younger pupils as prefects and in the sixth form they provide learning support for particular groups of younger pupils. All of these activities help to inculcate in pupils a strong sense of social responsibility and commitment to the community of which they are a part.

- 2.46 Assemblies, subjects and PSHCE allow opportunities for pupils to discuss issues of current relevance, including drugs, health and sex education. Various posters produced by pupils, about the dangers of drugs, 'binge' drinking and obesity, indicated a clear understanding of these dangers. Constraints of time in PSHCE mean that pupils have limited opportunities for extended discussion.
- 2.47 The constructive approach of staff to teaching and learning, their evident desire that pupils do well, and excellent relationships with them, all contribute to the development of a strong sense of identity and personal worth, whilst encouraging meaning and purpose. All of these are strong features of pupils' spiritual development. Pupils take advantage of opportunities in various subjects to explore values and beliefs, such as the inhumanity of slavery in history, issues related to conservation and development in geography or poverty and violence in English. Aesthetic appreciation is particularly enhanced in College Seniors through the high quality of art and drama. The religious beliefs of the major religions and their importance are covered in Years 7 to 9 in RE, but the lack of RE in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, as part of the core provision for all pupils, does not allow a further exploration of this key area of spiritual development when pupils are more mature.
- 2.48 Pupils gain a good understanding of their own culture through lessons, visits to museums, places of worship of various religions and art galleries, and through the celebration of different religious festivals and cultural traditions in assemblies and RE. These celebrations remind pupils of the cultural and religious diversity of Britain, but the school does not explore systematically the increasingly diverse nature of the country and its effects on cultural traditions.
- 2.49 The many overseas trips that are organised by a large number of subjects enhance pupils' experience greatly. In art, music and drama different traditions are explored, which broadens pupils' cultural understanding considerably.
- 2.50 Sixth form pupils gain much in the way of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development from the subjects that they study, and certain combinations provide powerful ways of developing further pupils' understanding. Pupils enhance their social development through supporting pupils lower down the school, and through the community and sports leadership courses in which two thirds of Year 12 are involved.

Whole school

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

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.52 The quality of teaching is good throughout the school and a number of strengths are shared across all age groups. These include the enthusiasm of the teachers, the excellent relationships that they have with their pupils and their intimate knowledge of pupils' learning needs. One of the most important of the school's aims is to help pupils achieve their potential, and the teaching is a key factor in pupils achieving this. At the time of the last inspection, the teaching was also good overall, but it was less consistently good; the needs of pupils with LDD were not always catered for so well and College Juniors lacked a library.

Ridgeway, College Juniors and the Nursery

- 2.53 The quality of teaching in the Nursery is good, with a number of outstanding features. Teaching is thoroughly planned and staff understand the needs of their pupils, including those with LDD and EAL very well. Relationships with pupils are excellent and the progress of pupils is tracked closely. Learning tasks stimulate progress and a growing facility with ICT. Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards to enhance their teaching.
- 2.54 From Reception to Year 6, teaching continues to be good. Teachers have a secure command of their material, and this is helped by the introduction of specialist teaching for older pupils in French, geography, history, music, physical education and science. Planning is very thorough and well-organised. This was so at the time of the last inspection at Ridgeway, but has improved significantly since then at College Juniors. Teachers also know their pupils' aptitudes and learning needs well and can draw upon the excellent provision for identifying and addressing pupils' learning difficulties. These arrangements help teachers respond well to the broadening of the ability range after Year 2, which is a particular feature at Ridgeway. Support for pupils who are gifted and talented is often good, but is not as consistently effective as that for pupils with LDD.
- 2.55 Teachers are enthusiastic about what they teach and succeed in enthusing their pupils. They have high expectations of learning and behaviour, which they combine with respect and affection. They generally use a variety of teaching strategies effectively, the most common of which is whole class teaching. Lessons are managed well, the quality of questioning is particularly good and this helps to inspire interest and debate as well as testing and consolidating understanding. However, where there is an over-reliance on work sheets or text book exercises, lessons lose their usually brisk pace and pupils' interest and enthusiasm declines, although they remain diligent.
- 2.56 Teaching creates an environment that is helpful to learning and encourages pupils to think carefully about what they are doing. The high expectations of teachers and their good class management ensure that pupils learn how to work well on their own and, more infrequently, in small groups. Fewer opportunities are provided for open-ended investigation involving independent research; most of these occur through homework tasks. Resources generally support teaching well; up-to-date textbooks are available and good libraries at Ridgeway and College provide valuable resources that are generally used well. Pupils are encouraged to make increasing use of ICT for independent research, for regular presentations and to present their work. Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards and data projectors in their teaching.

- 2.57 The marking of pupils' work is constructive, diagnostic and often includes helpful guidance on how pupils can improve their learning. This good practice is complemented by individual and group discussion that is much appreciated by pupils.
- 2.58 The comprehensive evidence about progress and achievement that the school collects, combined with the regular use of standardised national tests in English and mathematics, allows a close tracking of pupils' academic progress. Where particular needs are identified, appropriate plans are put in place and monitored closely, including individual education plans for pupils with LDD, where appropriate.

Claire's Court, College Seniors and the Sixth Form

- 2.59 The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and plan their lessons thoroughly. They know their pupils very well, which is a great strength of the teaching, and make good provision for the range of ability in classes, which on occasion is wide.
- 2.60 The teaching generally fosters interest and enjoyment amongst pupils. Class management is good and an easy rapport between teachers and pupils, together with a leavening of humour, ensures an atmosphere conducive to learning. This is further enhanced by the high quality of display celebrating the best of pupils' work.
- 2.61 Lesson planning is thorough and purposeful, so that teaching and learning build carefully on prior knowledge and skills, whilst catering effectively for the varied learning needs and abilities of pupils, particularly those with LDD and special educational needs. The quality of this planning reflects the often very good understanding that teachers have of their pupils' aptitudes, needs and prior attainment. They glean this from their own extensive knowledge and the clear and helpful guidance that they receive from the school's special educational needs department.
- 2.62 Lessons have a tight structure and clear framework, which helps to maintain pace of learning. Questioning is often used very well to encourage debate, consolidate knowledge and test understanding.
- 2.63 Good use is generally made of worksheets and textbooks, but this can occasionally lead to the setting of mundane tasks, which do not enthuse pupils and slow down the pace of learning.
- 2.64 A particular strength of the teaching is the extent and quality of support and guidance given to individual pupils. This assists teachers in addressing the sometimes wide spread of ability in classes well, encourages pupils to give of their best and helps to enthuse them and encourage good behaviour. It is particularly effective in the smaller classes higher up the school, but was seen being used to very good effect in a textiles lesson with Year 8 pupils. The dominant teaching method used is whole class teaching, which is nearly always used well to ensure progress in learning. The best teaching draws on a variety of teaching methods and sustains a brisk pace of learning. This is well illustrated by a Year 11 Spanish lesson that involved class discussion, individual and small group work and a listening task, all in 35 minutes.
- 2.65 Learning tasks set in lessons generally provide relatively little scope for pupils to engage in independent investigations outside the aesthetic and creative areas of the curriculum, or to use ICT. Homework tasks and work resulting from visits and trips provide more possibilities, which pupils often exploit well, making particularly effective use of the internet

and word-processing skills to produce work of interest and at times high quality, much of which is on display.

- 2.66 Other good features of the teaching include the manner in which departments have recognised the subtle differences in nuance of teaching boys and girls during Years 7 to 11, so that they can best meet the needs of all pupils through choice of teaching strategies and curriculum topics. In addition, departments have devised common assessment tasks and carried out moderation of assessment across the two senior schools, which allows common judgements to be reached about the achievements of boys and girls.
- 2.67 The assessment of pupils is good. The marking of pupils' work is regular and conscientious. It is always positive and encouraging and often includes comments that are diagnostically helpful in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. It is less common for clear learning targets to be identified, so that pupils know exactly what to prioritise in improving their performance. Written comments are often complemented by oral comments, both to groups and individuals, which help pupils understand how they can improve their work.
- 2.68 As well as the data that departments collect about pupils' progress and achievement, the school uses a range of nationally standardised tests to monitor pupils' progress against national norms. This extensive data is used to monitor pupils' performance closely, intervene swiftly if progress begins to stall, set learning targets for pupils and inform parents.
- 2.69 Teaching in the sixth form mirrors many of the strengths of teaching lower down the school. Relationships with pupils are excellent, lessons are well planned, teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable, teaching is sharply focused on relevant syllabus requirements and the quality of guidance and support is excellent. Pupils' work is marked regularly and often in detail, with comments that are constructive, diagnostic and often identify clearly what pupils have to do to gain higher marks. Pupils' notes are not always monitored to ensure that they provide a helpful resource for reference and revision purposes. The school uses a combination of its own frequent assessments and nationally standardised data to monitor the progress of pupils against its own expectations and national norms. Recent changes have increased the intensity of monitoring of pupils' progress, particularly early in Year 12, which has allowed the quicker identification of pupils encountering problems and the drawing up of plans to address these.

Whole school

- 2.70 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

Pastoral Care

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care, support and guidance is excellent across all parts of the school. Staff know pupils very well and relationships are marked by a strong sense of mutual trust and respect. The arrangements for pastoral care are efficient and effective, with secure procedures, clearly detailed responsibilities and staff who work very closely together in order to ensure that pupils are very well cared for.
- 3.2 Through the quality of its pastoral care, the school demonstrates its commitment to the aim of generating an understanding of the need for care and consideration of others. This area of provision remains a great strength of the school, as at the time of the last inspection.

Ridgeway, College Juniors and the Nursery

- 3.3 Class teachers and assistants know the pupils in their classes very well and play a key role in their pastoral care, offering excellent support and guidance. Senior managers are also closely involved in pastoral care. They have a detailed knowledge of the personal histories of pupils, know parents well and monitor pupils' academic progress and personal well-being very closely as they move through the school. Any significant issues and concerns are always discussed with them. These arrangements are very effective in securing the personal well-being of pupils and their health and safety.
- 3.4 Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and friendly. Pupils can readily identify adults that they would turn to with a problem, including class teachers, senior managers and the school nurse. The behaviour of pupils is excellent and they quickly internalise the key school values of respect for self and others, which then guide their behaviour and relationships with others. This internalisation is greatly helped by the manner in which staff exemplify these principles in their relationships with pupils and through the constructive manner in which rewards and sanctions are used. Instances of bullying and harassment are reported to be very rare and many pupils could not identify any such instances. Where they have occurred they have been resolved expeditiously in a manner that protected pupils' self-esteem, in line with anti-bullying procedures and policies.

Claires Court, College Seniors and Sixth Form

- 3.5 Form tutors and subject teachers know their pupils very well, monitor their academic progress and personal well-being very carefully and provide helpful support and guidance. At Claives Court and in the sixth form, heads of year work closely with pupils, form tutors, subject teachers and parents to address developing concerns and issues. In College Seniors, with a much smaller number of pupils, an assistant head, with the support of the head, carries out the same role effectively. Relationships between teachers and pupils, and amongst pupils, are warm, friendly and mutually respectful, reflecting the strong community spirit that is a characteristic of all parts of the senior schools. Pupils arriving in the school during Years 8 to 11, and those who arrive at the start of the sixth form, commented very positively on how easily they were integrated into the community. In the event of any problems or concerns, pupils can identify a number of staff to whom they can readily turn for help. The schools also provide a confidential counselling service, run by a professionally trained counsellor, to whom pupils can be referred or see privately, on their own initiative.

- 3.6 Discipline and behaviour throughout the senior schools are very good. Clear expectations about behaviour are laid out in school contracts that pupils and parents sign when their children join the school and again at the start of the sixth form. The values of the senior schools, which under-pin discipline and behaviour, were drawn up in consultation with pupils. These are fully understood by pupils and help to guide their behaviour. The senior schools have appropriate system of rewards and sanctions that are understood by pupils and regarded as fair and just, both in principle and in their practice. Careful records are kept of any serious misdemeanours and of the sanctions imposed.
- 3.7 Claire's Court and College Seniors have house systems that encourage friendly rivalry in sports and other activities, whilst forming part of the rewards system. Commendations and house points act as extra incentives to encourage responsible behaviour and achievement and are particularly valued by younger pupils.
- 3.8 The schools have clear and fully appropriate anti-bullying procedures and policies of which pupils are fully aware, but are seldom necessary according to them. Where a bullying incident takes place, pupils are universal in their view that the matter is dealt with expeditiously and effectively to the benefit of all concerned.

Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils

- 3.9 Arrangements to secure the welfare, health and safety of pupils are comprehensive and well organised, ensuring that pupils learn and play in a very secure and safe environment.
- 3.10 The school has all the necessary child protection measures in place. Each site has two fully trained child protection officers who are members of senior management. All staff have had training from a child protection specialist in how to recognise child protection issues and the procedures to follow where a concern is expressed. The specialist also monitors the school's practice regularly. The appropriate checks by the Criminal Records Bureau have been carried out for all staff and the proprietors, and there are effective procedures in place to ensure that all newly appointed staff are swiftly put through this process.
- 3.11 The school's health and safety committee meets regularly and is responsible for all health and safety matters. It includes representatives from each school site, is chaired by the administrative principal and benefits from the input of a specialist health and safety consultant, who monitors all health and safety matters across the three sites closely, including visiting each site twice a term. Where any concerns are raised by the visiting consultant, or staff on any of the sites, they are dealt with efficiently and expeditiously.
- 3.12 Careful and thorough risk assessments are carried out for any activity in the school involving an element of risk and for all school visits and trips, with careful records kept of these assessments. This process is regularly monitored by the external health and safety consultant during his visits to the school. Similarly, detailed fire risk assessments are carried out and reviewed regularly.
- 3.13 A considerable number of staff on each site have had first aid training and there are adequate medical supplies in appropriate areas. There is a fully qualified first aider on each site, who provides good quality care and advice in the case of injury and illness, as well as more informal guidance and support.
- 3.14 Admissions registers meet all the necessary requirements, as do attendance registers. Pupils' absences are followed up swiftly and tenaciously to ensure that parents know about them and that they are justified. Levels of unauthorised absence are very low and general levels of attendance are excellent.

- 3.15 The school has introduced a healthy eating and living policy since the last inspection and a large proportion of the food served is now prepared on site. School meals have improved considerably in nutritional value and quality as a result and provide a wide choice of healthy dishes of a good quality. Drinks and snacks available from machines also now encourage healthy eating habits. Pupils are strongly encouraged to take regular exercise.
- 3.16 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

- 3.17 The school has outstanding links with parents and continues to develop very good links with the local community. The school has continued to build on the strong links that it had at the time of the last inspection, with the notable addition of its 'wrap-around' care provision for its own pupils and a popular holiday club for local children. It is very successful in achieving its aim of working with parents and guardians to help pupils achieve their full potential.
- 3.18 Responses in pre-inspection parental questionnaires indicate high levels of satisfaction with the school's educational provision. Teaching, extra-curricular activities, the academic curriculum, and the moral and social values of the school were particularly highly rated by parents. Many made positive comments about the school. Amongst the small minority of parents expressing contrary views, there were no significant common themes.
- 3.19 Parents have opportunities to involve themselves in the life of the schools through the two parental associations, College Parent Teachers Association and Claire's Court and Ridgeway Society, which work closely together in the organisation of events such as the Easter egg hunt, the May ball, the summer fete, and bonfire night. Parents are encouraged to strengthen their role in the academic partnership with the school by countersigning homework diaries and entering suitable comments, as well as by attendance at parents' evenings.
- 3.20 A comprehensive flow of information is provided for both parents and prospective parents. The easily navigable website makes a wide range of documentation readily available, for example prospectuses, curriculum statements, weekly news bulletins, term dates, and academic handbooks. The school reports regularly on the achievement of current pupils, issuing on average a progress report each half-term. Two of these in each academic year are full written reports which show evidence of detailed knowledge of each child on the part of the teaching staff. Strategies for improvement are suggested on all full reports, both overall and in respect to individual subjects. However, individual subject comment and advice sometimes do not focus sufficiently sharply on exactly what pupils need to do in order to improve their performance. The three heads are readily accessible to parents and encourage consultation.
- 3.21 The school has comprehensive and appropriate formal complaints procedures for the handling of parental complaints. The school aims to handle concerns informally in the first instance and this is nearly always successful. When full procedures had to be implemented in recent years, they were done so in a fully satisfactory manner.
- 3.22 The school enjoys excellent relations with a wide range of local clubs and organisations and participates actively in the cultural life of the local community through involvement in events such as the Windsor and Marlow festivals and the Rotary public speaking competition. It makes its premises available to local organisations and participates in partnership arrangements with the local rugby, rowing and sailing clubs. The school also provides a 'wrap-around' care service for its own pupils and a popular holiday club, which provide a

valued community service and have been praised by Ofsted and the local authority for their quality. The school is currently training sixth formers in relevant care qualifications so that they can take on formal care roles and extend the involvement of the school in this initiative. Awareness of the needy is raised through charitable giving, for example, to the Catholic Children's Society, Breast Cancer Care, and the Neuroblastoma Society. Pupils regularly provide musical entertainments for local care homes, hospices and community centres and the delivery of Christmas hampers to homeless people in London is a notable initiative in which both sixth formers and staff participate.

- 3.23 Excellent wider cultural and community links are cultivated through an active programme of visits and expeditions, linked to the sporting and academic programmes. Such trips enable pupils to reflect on the contrasts between the quality of their own lives and those of other cultures and times, for example as evidenced by visits revealing the poverty of a South African township, the exoticism of a Spanish bull ring in Andalusia, the dignity and desolation of a battlefield cemetery in Flanders or the experience of living in colonial Williamsburg at the time of the American Colonies.
- 3.24 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The governance of the school is good. The academic and administrative principals are joint owners of the school. They have been in the school more than thirty years and in their current positions more than twenty years. Both know the school very well, are experienced, well-qualified and highly respected in the school, as at the time of the last inspection.
- 4.2 The executive management committee, the senior decision-making committee in the school, carries out many functions of a governing body. It includes the two principals, the heads of individual schools and the school's senior administrator. It is a forum, in particular, for the discussion of strategic issues and for strategic planning, including ensuring that the school fulfils its aims and remains true to its values. The heads of individual schools are encouraged to express their views and minutes indicate that considered judgements are reached after considerable discussion.
- 4.3 Priorities for school development are identified clearly and the financial planning to support these priorities is carried out carefully to determine appropriate time scales and ensure that the funding is secure. This has led to some significant improvements since the last inspection across the three sites. These include a new sports hall, indoor swimming pool and music accommodation; the refurbishment of teaching accommodation, including science laboratories; and the up-grading of the sixth form centre. These developments have improved the quality of the teaching accommodation considerably and up-graded facilities for extra-curricular activities.
- 4.4 In order to help meet statutory obligations in areas such as child protection and health and safety, ensure specialist support for careers education and guidance and provide an independent person to consider complaints, the proprietors have recruited specialist consultants to provide regular support, guidance and monitoring of provision. This group of people, known as Visitors, has helped to make these areas of school provision very secure and provides an example of the imaginative way in which the proprietors address developing issues.
- 4.5 Relationships between the proprietors and staff are good. Both principals are well known, particularly the academic principal, who is also the head of Claire's Court, and are regarded as approachable and responsive to staff views.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.6 The leadership and management of the Claire's Court Schools are good. The principal and heads of the constituent schools provide clear leadership and direction and set the tone of the school. This is reflected in the good quality of educational experience, the excellent care of pupils and attention to individual needs, and the creation of an ethos of responsibility, care and respect for others. A hallmark of this ethos is the natural trust and affection that pupils and staff have for each other.
- 4.7 Senior management provides energetic and supportive leadership to ensure that the school's aims are met. The principal and his senior colleagues are effective in analysing the school's needs, setting priorities, planning to meet those priorities and taking decisive action. The whole-school development plan links departmental plans to an overall strategy and identifies major capital projects, as well as measures for further enhancing the ethos of the school.

Financial resources are well managed to secure appropriate resources that meet the immediate needs of the school's pupils and to accommodate a programme of major development. Strategic planning is now significantly better than it was at the time of the last inspection and all staff have job descriptions.

- 4.8 Teaching and support staff are deployed effectively and give generously of their time, making a valuable contribution to pupils' learning and welfare. Staff recruitment is managed well, so that the school has a loyal dedicated high quality work force. Induction procedures for staff new to the school are generally thorough. This is always so for newly qualified teachers and inexperienced staff, but occasionally arrangements for the induction of experienced staff are not so thorough. Not all the staff are fully apprised of changes being introduced to systems, structures and the strategic direction of the school.
- 4.9 The graduates following the school based in-service teacher-training scheme are supported well and all the necessary requirements are fulfilled.
- 4.10 The school has a comprehensive and well organised appraisal system that monitors individual staff performance, provides them with an opportunity to discuss any concerns that they have and identifies areas for development, addressing both individual and school training needs. Staff find the process helpful.
- 4.11 The administration of the Claires Court Schools, and of its individual constituent parts, is efficient and effective. The buildings and grounds are very well maintained and the catering is of a high quality. The school benefits greatly from dedication of the non-teaching staff, which mirrors that of teaching staff.

Ridgeway, College Juniors and the Nursery

- 4.12 The experienced head at Ridgeway and recently appointed head of College Juniors, give clear educational direction and approachable leadership, with good support from their senior management teams. Likewise, the Nursery benefits from very strong leadership. Since the last inspection, much work has been done to strengthen links between Ridgeway and Claires Court Juniors. Management roles have also been considerably strengthened and clarified. Staff at both senior and middle management levels at Ridgeway and College Juniors liaise regularly in order to provide a more consistent educational experience for their pupils. This is resulting in the development of common whole-school policies, schemes of work and common assessment procedures. The College Juniors and Ridgeway development plans identify clear areas and priorities for short- and long-term development, and their progress is reviewed regularly, which was not so at the time of the last inspection.
- 4.13 Policies covering all aspects of school life are in place and implemented effectively, which was not fully so at the time of the last inspection, as well as being evaluated regularly. Subject co-ordinators are responsible for monitoring subjects across the school, and provide training for colleagues and liaison with their counterparts elsewhere. This role is well established at Ridgeway, but is at an early stage in College Juniors.

Claires Court, College Seniors and Sixth Form

- 4.14 The heads of Claires Court and College are well known by pupils and staff and they provide clear educational direction and leadership. They work well with their senior management teams to ensure that the day to day running of the schools is efficient, and that policies and procedures emanating from strategic planning are implemented effectively, which was not always the case at the time of the last inspection. Communication at a personal level is excellent and much appreciated by pupils and staff; professional relationships are very good.

- 4.15 The management structures of the two schools are clear and have served them well, but they do not fully take account of the increased numbers of pupils in the two schools. This has created onerous burdens on some senior managers, notably the heads. Changes to management, in train during the inspection, are intended to address this problem.
- 4.16 Since the last inspection, the position of academic departments has been rationalised, so that each department and head of department is responsible for provision across both schools. This has improved consistency in practices and procedures. Heads of department act as good lead professionals and manage their departments well, providing helpful guidance and support for their colleagues. Occasionally they do not monitor marking practices closely enough, and some are not always actively involved in the whole school decision-making process.
- 4.17 The sixth form is managed well and is benefiting from the closer monitoring of teaching, learning and pupils' progress that has been introduced recently. Nearly all the provision is now on the College site and pupils are punctual to lessons, which was not so at the time of the last inspection.

Whole school

- 4.18 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.19 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 Claives Court Schools is a good school that provides a good education, excellent pastoral care, high academic standards and some outstanding sporting achievements. It fulfils its stated aims successfully. It is a happy school, which pupils enjoy attending and where they grow academically, socially and morally. The curriculum is broad and serves the interests of pupils well, and rather better than at the time of the last inspection. PSHCE provision has developed since the last inspection, but is still constrained by limitations in time provided in the curriculum. ICT provision has improved since the last inspection and the school has equipped a considerable number of classrooms with an interactive whiteboard or data projector. These are not yet being utilised to best effect as a resource for teaching and learning in the senior schools. Senior and middle managers carry out their roles and responsibilities well. Middle managers do not always recognise fully the valuable contribution that they can make to the whole-school decision-making process.
- 5.2 The school has made considerable progress since the last inspection. It has maintained and further improved many of its good features. It has also addressed the issues raised at the time of the last inspection successfully, with minor exceptions, where they have major cost implications. The school is now under-taking a building programme that will provide the necessary specialist accommodation. Management has been strengthened; strategic planning has improved, management roles are clearly defined and a good appraisal system is in place. The accommodation has improved considerably, with a specialist sports hall at Ridgeway, so that pupils do not have to go off site, an indoor swimming pool, the up-grading of the sixth form centre and the creation of a pleasant well-stocked library for College Juniors, together with improvements to specialist accommodation at College and Claives Court. These improvements have significantly enhanced the teaching and learning environment.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no major weakness, but, in order to improve still further its provision, it should:
1. find ways of involving middle management more actively in the whole school policy decision-making process;
 2. develop further the effective use of interactive whiteboards and data projectors to support teaching in the senior schools;
 3. develop further PSHCE provision across the school.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 11th to 14th February 2008. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with proprietors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mr Ted Cohn	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Jan Preece	Assistant Reporting Inspector
Mr Paul Spillane	Assistant Reporting Inspector
Mrs Amanda Barnes	Deputy Head, ISA School
Mr Neil Bolton	Director of Studies, HMC School
Mrs Louise Compton	Head of Prep-Prep Department, ISA School
Mr Robert Gullifer	Deputy Head, HMC School
Mr Stephen Jefferson	Member of Senior Management Team, GSA School
Mr Ray Mardle	Member of Senior Management Team, HMC School
Mrs Ann Musgrave	Deputy Head, ISA School
Miss Stephanie Pattenden	Headmistress, GSA School
Mr Nick Plater	Director of Studies, HMC School
Mrs Philippa Thomson	Head of Junior Department, GSA School
Dr Patrick Wilmore	Examinations Officer, HMC School
Mr Stephen Yeo	Headmaster, ISA School