



Regulatory Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Tower College

June 2021

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School's Details

School	Tower College			
DfE number	342/6001			
Early Years registration number	EY437686			
Registered charity number	526611			
Address	Tower College Mill Lane Rainhill Prescot Merseyside L35 6NE			
Telephone number	0151 426 4333			
Email address	office@towercollege.com			
Headteacher	Ms Andrea Bingley			
Chair of governors	Mr Daniel Oxley			
Age range	0 to 16			
Number of pupils on roll	447			
	EYFS Tower Tots	144		
	EYFS Pre-Prep	28	Years 1 to 4 Lower School	84
	Years 5 to 8 Middle School	88	Years 9 to 11 Upper School	103
Inspection dates	15 to 18 June 2021			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Tower College is a co-educational day school for pupils aged 0 to 16 years. It was founded in 1948 and is situated in Rainhill, Merseyside. It is a charitable trust and operates as a limited company, whose directors are the school's proprietors and who oversee the work of the school as a board of governors. The school has a pre-preparatory department for children aged 3 to 5 years in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), a lower school for pupils aged 5 to 9 years, a middle school for those aged 9 to 13 years and an upper school for pupils aged 13 to 16 years. The school also has a separate setting located within the school grounds, Tower Tots, which provides day-care throughout the year for children aged 0 to 5. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has taken up her post in September 2018.
- 1.2 During the period March to August 2020, the whole school remained open only for children of key workers. During this period of closure, the school provided remote learning materials for all pupils.
- 1.3 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on-site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.4 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.5 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021, all pupils other than the children of key workers or vulnerable pupils received remote learning provision at home.
- 1.6 In 2020, public examinations were not held. For pupils who would have been expected to take these examinations, centre-assessed grades were awarded.
- 1.7 Since 2020, EYFS profiles have not been externally moderated.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.8 The school seeks to give each pupil a well-rounded education. It aims to provide pupils with the opportunities and support not only to achieve excellent academic progress, but also to gain fundamental life skills such as finding their own strong voice, being outward-looking and confident in their own abilities, being kind and considerate, becoming a responsible citizen, being an effective listener, being creative and being able to solve problems both individually and as part of a team.

About the pupils

- 1.9 Pupils come primarily from professional families, drawn from a wide catchment area covering Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside. Nationally standardised tests indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average. The school has identified 41 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), all of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan, and no pupils have English as an additional language.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 In the lower and middle school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2018 to 2020, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

The quality and standards of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision

- 2.21 The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.
- 2.22 Leaders implement an extremely well-structured curriculum that meets the relevant statutory requirements of the EYFS as well as the needs and interests of the children. It supports the children's development in the prime areas of their learning extremely well, including for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and additional needs. Comprehensive monitoring practices ensure that the curriculum is implemented effectively. The setting provides a very high standard of care, and staff demonstrate a deep knowledge of how children of this age learn. All children under the age of two make good or better progress from their starting points and are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- 2.23 Due to the excellent levels of care that the setting provides, the personal and emotional development of the children is excellent, and children consistently demonstrate that they feel safe, secure and happy. All requirements for the children's safeguarding and welfare are met. There is a shared understanding of the responsibility for safeguarding so that every child is safe in the setting.
- 2.24 The setting's leaders strive for continuous improvement through detailed, cohesive self-evaluation and they articulate a clear vision for future developments. They show strong commitment to ensuring that all children receive the best possible support and care.

Quality of education

- 2.25 The quality of education is outstanding.
- 2.26 The curriculum provides excellent opportunities for the development of children's communication, language and physical skills and for their personal, social and emotional development. Regular monitoring of the curriculum and the evaluation of the activities provided result in all children receiving a high level of support for their learning needs. Next steps and children's interests form the basis for detailed individual planning for children's needs.
- 2.27 Staff have consistently high expectations for the children in their care. They have an excellent understanding of how babies and young children learn and develop. Carefully planned activities, which reflect the interest and stage of development of each child, allow them to explore, discover and be curious. This was observed, for example, when staff challenged a baby's problem-solving skills by filling jugs with water and then pouring it into another container. Adults demonstrated how to do it and then, through gentle prompts, encouraged the baby to 'have a go' and keep trying until it succeeded. Positive feedback is given to children through the appropriate use of praise and encouragement, which helps them to acquire the skills and attitudes to learn effectively.
- 2.28 Staff readily engage with children during routine activities and take every opportunity to develop the children's language and social skills. They read and sing with the children, encouraging them to repeat words, answer simple questions and join in with songs and actions.
- 2.29 Staff make excellent use of the opportunities when interacting with the children, to introduce mathematical language by counting and talking to the children about shape and size. There are many opportunities for children to develop their physical skills both in the outdoor area and inside, where children move confidently around the environment taking risks and challenges.
- 2.30 Through their planning and meticulous record keeping, staff pay careful attention to ensuring that children make consistently strong progress across the learning and development programmes of the EYFS. The setting uses an online app as a record of progress, which enables assessment to be applied

very effectively in developing children's learning. This serves to identify those children who may be falling behind so that the curriculum can be tailored to support them appropriately.

- 2.31 Babies are taken for daily walks in pushchairs into the local community. They visit the shop, the library and the train station, enabling them to broaden their experience of the wider world.
- 2.32 The stimulating experiences that the children receive provide them with a solid foundation on which their future learning can be built. All children, from the earliest age, are very well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Behaviour and attitudes

- 2.33 Behaviour and attitudes are outstanding.
- 2.34 Children show great enjoyment in their learning, and they make excellent use of the available resources in the rooms which allow them to explore and make choices. However, there are limited opportunities for children to explore natural materials and real-life objects. Toddlers show great fascination as they experiment with mark making and sensory experiences such as exploring oats during a story-based activity. They explore different ways of stacking bricks to make towers. Babies ably use a spoon to feed themselves, and toddlers wash their hands, showing that they are developing strong skills of independence.
- 2.35 Toddlers maintain considerable focus on activities for appropriate periods of time such as during circle time; activities such as these enable children to develop good habits for future learning. Babies sustain high levels of concentration as they choose animal pictures to sing about the noises that they make in a familiar song. They are keen to 'have a go' for themselves and will persevere until they manage to do something; for example, a baby kept trying different ways to manoeuvre a pushchair around the room avoiding obstacles, and a toddler filled containers with sand and then carefully moved them without spilling any.
- 2.36 Staff encourage children to be creative and inventive in their play so that they can develop their own ideas and choose ways to do things. For example, a toddler with a strong interest in vehicles was given resources to build a bridge for them; he persisted by carefully selecting the appropriate pieces that fitted together.
- 2.37 Children demonstrate excellent behaviour and show great respect for one another. They respond to sensitive reminders from staff about using gentle hands, how to share things and how to play co-operatively. The setting has a highly effective partnership with parents which successfully promotes children's attendance. Procedures are in place to investigate unexpected absences.

Personal development

- 2.38 The personal development of children is outstanding.
- 2.39 Extremely effective care practices support children's emotional security and the development of their character, so that they feel safe, happy and secure. Each key person's excellent knowledge of their children's unique needs ensures they know how to respond effectively. As children wake from their sleep, staff offer a secure environment, talking gently to them and giving them time. Parents commented to inspectors that they are very impressed by the high standard of emotional support given to their children. They have great confidence in the standard of care offered at the setting.
- 2.40 Staff encourage children to take appropriate risks both indoors and in the outside area. Children attempt to do adventurous things, such as negotiating the steps and rope bridge on the climbing frame and negotiating different levels and surfaces in the outdoor area.
- 2.41 Staff help children to lead a healthy lifestyle from the very beginning of their time at the setting. They are provided with high-quality cooked food, fresh drinking water and fruit. All children have regular access to outside areas that are well equipped to promote physical activity.

- 2.42 Hygiene practices, which are diligently followed by everyone, ensure that the personal needs of the children at this age are met appropriately. Staff encourage children to understand the need for and importance of handwashing before meals and on arrival at the setting.
- 2.43 All staff give high priority to safeguarding and are aware of their responsibilities to ensure that they meet the EYFS statutory requirements for safeguarding, welfare and learning and development.
- 2.44 Staff are highly effective in preparing children for life in modern Britain by enabling them to make decisions, such as choosing a book to read and deciding which particular activity to explore. As they encourage them to share and take turns, children learn to respect and care for one another. Children celebrate a variety of British festivals together with those from other cultures. All children are offered the same experiences and, as they play with dolls and small-world figures representing different cultures, they gain an understanding of diversity. British values of fairness, tolerance and kindness towards each other underpin the setting.

Leadership and management

- 2.45 Leadership and management are good.
- 2.46 The strong direction from the leadership team results in an enthusiastic and strong team of staff who share an ambitious vision to provide high-quality education and exemplary levels of care. They realise this through shared values, policies and practice. They consistently monitor the standards of care and regularly scrutinise the curriculum to ensure that high standards are maintained. They have high expectations of what children under two can achieve, as well as very clear understanding about supporting all children so that they achieve the best outcomes.
- 2.47 Staff are well qualified. Their performance is monitored carefully through annual appraisal, supported by an effective system of individual meetings which enable staff to discuss issues, including their own well-being. Staff attend a range of professional development courses to enable them to develop their skills and update their practice which has a positive impact on children's outcomes.
- 2.48 The setting has strong links with parents. They are encouraged to contribute to their children's learning and assessments. In interviews, they reported that they are well informed about the progress their children are making and how they can support this at home. They are overwhelmingly appreciative of the care their individual children receive and commented on the 'significant' progress their children have made and of the 'amazing' care that their children receive.
- 2.49 Leaders and managers know the children very well and respond quickly to their needs, including those with SEND and additional needs. The setting can access internal specialist help when required, together with support from outside agencies through the local authority. Thorough systems are in place to ensure that every child's needs are met.
- 2.50 Whilst the setting's leader contributes a brief report to meetings of the governing body, governors have little involvement in overseeing the work of the setting, holding leaders to account for the quality of care and education, or contributing their views on the vision and strategy for the setting's future development.
- 2.51 High priority is given by the staff to safeguarding and the implementation of all health and safety policies to ensure that children are kept safe. They fully comply with statutory duties for example under the Equality Act 2010 and other duties in relation to the 'Prevent' strategy and the safer recruitment of staff.

Compliance with statutory requirements

- 2.52 The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 and no action is required.**

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance the provision of natural and real-life objects to encourage curiosity and investigation.
- Ensure that the governing body maintains effective oversight of the setting, holds leaders to account for the quality of care and education, and contributes to developing the vision and strategy for the setting.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils make good progress throughout the school and achieve examination results which are above the national average for maintained schools.
- Pupils have continued to make good progress during the COVID-19 pandemic as the school has adapted its teaching to provide a full timetable taught remotely.
- In the EYFS, the lower and middle school, pupils are enthusiastic and enjoy their learning; in the upper school, pupils work hard, but do not evince a similar level of enthusiasm for their work.
- Pupils' progress is at times hampered by a lack of creativity in the teaching and over-prescriptive tasks which limit pupils' responses and stifle their independence and initiative.
- Pupils' extra-curricular achievements have diminished markedly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.

- Pupils make good progress in their moral, social and cultural development, particularly in the lower and middle school thanks to a comprehensive PSHE programme.
- Children in the EYFS in Tower Tots make rapid progress in their personal, social and emotional development under the close scrutiny and careful guidance of their key workers and support staff.
- Pupils show strong respect for and tolerance of others, regardless of culture, background or differences; relationships amongst the pupils and between pupils and staff are strong.
- Pupils have shown excellent understanding of how to follow guidelines to keep safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Pupils' social development is good; pupils are polite, courteous and well behaved.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Improve pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills by adopting a more creative approach to the teaching of the curriculum.
- Improve pupils' progress and encourage their independence and initiative by providing more challenging and more open-ended tasks.

- Improve pupils' achievements outside the formal curriculum and further their personal development by providing a broad range of extra-curricular activities and ensuring high levels of participation from all pupils.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.5 Pupils make good progress throughout the school so that, by the time they leave Year 11, they achieve examination results which enable them to gain places at the sixth-form college or other place of further education of their choice. In the period 2017 to 2019, GCSE examination results have been above the national average for maintained schools. Centre-assessed grades in 2020 show results which are consistent with this attainment; almost every result was assessed at grade 4 or above and just over half were awarded grades 7, 8 or 9. The school's own analysis of assessment data shows that the large majority of pupils achieved higher grades than those predicted by baseline tests undertaken in Years 7 and 9, with progress in English language and English literature being particularly strong. Closer analysis shows that, with slight variations, all groups including girls, boys, the more able and those with SEND all make better than predicted progress.
- 3.6 Children in Tower Tots and the pre-prep make great strides in all areas of learning, developing a sense of inquisitiveness and becoming increasingly independent. In Tower Tots, children settle to their activities quickly and enjoy their learning activities. Pupils in the lower and middle schools make good progress in developing their communication and numeracy skills. For example, pupils in Year 1 enjoyed an outdoor lesson in which they developed their use of similes and adjectives to describe the sunny conditions. They deepen their knowledge and understanding in other subjects and acquire the ability to work together with a partner or in groups. However, their progress, and particularly that of the more able pupils, is hampered by a lack of creativity in some of the teaching methods. This is seen, for example, in the frequent use of worksheets which encourage uniformity and limit pupils' responses rather than allowing them the freedom to explore topics in depth and exercise their own initiative and independence. The school's leaders have identified this lack of creativity and, shortly before the inspection, set up a forum for all staff members to collaborate and implement new initiatives to support a more enriched curriculum, to enable the school more amply to fulfil its aims of inspiring children to be their best selves and giving them a well-rounded education.
- 3.7 In the upper school, pupils make limited progress in acquiring higher-order study skills and developing their own independence and initiative. This is because the teaching, although very successful in helping pupils to exceed their predicted grades at GCSE, places an over-emphasis on meeting the demands of the examination. Whilst pupils show a willingness to work hard and apply themselves well in lessons, they are noticeably less enthusiastic about their lessons in this part of the school compared with the bubbling enthusiasm of pupils lower down the school. A large majority of the older pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire acknowledged that their teachers know their subjects well and that they learn a lot in lessons, but two-thirds said they do not always find their lessons interesting, a view reflected in the findings of the inspection.
- 3.8 Pupils have continued to make good progress throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, even when the school has had to be closed other than for children of key workers and a small number of pupils with SEND. This is because the school has worked hard to adapt its teaching and provide a full timetable of online lessons and support. This has had a marked beneficial impact on pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Pupils have become skilled in using standard applications on computers and tablet devices, accessing lessons remotely, and completing their work and submitting it electronically. Up to the end of Year 8, pupils show great skill in their dedicated ICT lessons. For example, pupils in Year 6 showed studied concentration and skill as they manipulated images and objects to create three-dimensional drawings of a computer workstation. However, now that pupils

are back in the classroom, these good skills are not being applied or developed as effectively as they could be in other subjects of the curriculum.

- 3.9 Pupils' communication skills develop particularly well in the EYFS, and in the lower and middle schools. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to engage in class discussions and to communicate with each other when working with a partner or in groups. They listen well to each other and their teachers and speak confidently within the classroom. Various speaking competitions, debates and classroom presentations contribute positively to the development of these skills. Written work is generally of a high standard, and pupils enjoy reading. Structured reading opportunities for the youngest pupils and a summer reading challenge have had a positive impact on developing pupils' enjoyment of reading. The restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have had an adverse impact on the communication skills of older pupils who have become more withdrawn than younger pupils; for example, many found it hard, lacked confidence or were reluctant to communicate with inspectors. Within the classroom, however, pupils displayed much greater confidence to voice their opinions.
- 3.10 Pupils' numeracy skills develop well, though not as strongly as in English. One of the reasons for this is a lack of emphasis on problem-solving skills or the opportunity for pupils to apply these skills in different contexts, a relative weakness which has already been identified by the school's leaders. Recent initiatives which have helped to improve the progress of both the more able and the less able mathematicians have been the introduction of further mathematics as an extra GCSE subject for those who excel at mathematics and the opportunity for less able pupils to take functional skills examinations, so they are better prepared when the time comes to take their GCSE mathematics examinations.
- 3.11 Prior to April 2020, pupils broadened their achievements by participating in a range of extra-curricular academic, non-academic, and sporting activities, although the range of such activities and the level of participation were not extensive. In the pre-prep, lower and middle schools, pupils variously participated and developed skills in activities such as yoga, swimming, dance, football, karate, judo and music. In the upper school, pupils have developed their speaking skills through taking part in public-speaking competitions, Model United Nations debates and the Cranmer awards. Sporting prowess improved through representing the school in a limited range of sporting activities, whilst a few pupils developed a range of skills through participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Various individuals have been selected for local, county and national teams in football and a few other sports. Pupils from the school have regularly achieved success in regional physics Olympiads and the 'Digital Enterprise Award'. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, pupils' other achievements have been severely curtailed as almost all extra-curricular activities have stopped. This has also had a marked impact on pupils' enjoyment of school and their sense of fulfilment. Almost half of the parents who responded to the questionnaire feel that the school does not offer a suitable range of extra-curricular activities, a view which is supported by the findings of this inspection. The school's leaders have also identified that the school is currently not fulfilling all aspects of its aim to provide a well-rounded education and has drawn up plans to re-introduce a range of opportunities for pupils to achieve outside the formal curriculum and to encourage pupils to participate in this programme.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.12 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.13 Pupils make good progress in their moral, social and cultural development, particularly in the EYFS and in the lower and middle school. A well-designed and comprehensive personal, social, and health education (PSHE) programme, which includes relationships education throughout the school and sex education for the older pupils, contributes strongly to this development.
- 3.14 Children in the EYFS in Tower Tots make rapid progress in their personal, social and emotional development under the close scrutiny and careful guidance of their key workers and support staff. They quickly learn the daily routines which help the setting to function smoothly, and they become

increasingly independent as they are given opportunity to choose their various activities. They have an excellent grasp of moral values, such as kindness, and a very clear understanding of right and wrong, resulting in excellent behaviour in the classroom, the playground and when moving around the school. They enjoy working and playing with others, showing sensitivity, understanding and tolerance towards each other, regardless of background or abilities. They develop a good understanding of what is needed to stay healthy and safe. Although in a slightly more formal setting, similar progress is seen with children in the EYFS in the main school.

- 3.15 Throughout the school, pupils have shown an excellent understanding of how to follow the guidelines and the school's procedures to keep safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, even though this has involved significant restrictions on their movements around the school and the activities open to them after school. With the greatly increased usage of ICT, particularly during lockdown, pupils have developed a good understanding of how to stay safe online. Younger pupils make well-informed and sensible decisions about food, their mental health and physical well-being; well-being Wednesdays, and the focus on mindfulness, healthy mindsets and healthy snacks contribute here. Older pupils understand the principles of healthy diet and the importance of exercise and a balanced lifestyle, but participation rates when physical activities were available after school show that not all put this knowledge into practice. All pupils know to whom they can turn if they have any concerns about safety and have every confidence that they are living within a safe environment where there is mutual support amongst the pupils and strong support and guidance from the staff.
- 3.16 Pupils show strong respect for and tolerance of others thanks to the overriding ethos of the school, where difference is appreciated as having something positive to contribute. Poor behaviour and lack of respect are dealt with quickly by the school, and pupils appreciate and comment on the inclusivity and ease with which pupils from different cultures and backgrounds show respect towards each other. Before the COVID-19 restrictions, visits from people representing different faiths and backgrounds helped to broaden pupils' understanding. During lockdown, pupils from different backgrounds produced presentations for all pupils in the school; these were well received and gained many positive comments.
- 3.17 Pupils show a willingness to contribute to the school and the local community, but opportunities for them to do so in recent times have been severely limited as pupils' movement around the school has been restricted to year-group bubbles. Under normal circumstances, the oldest pupils contribute to the smooth running of the school by carrying out duties as prefects, whilst pupils in Year 10 engage in weekly reading activities with pupils in Years 3 and 4. Such activities strengthen the bonds and relationships between pupils in the school. Pupils, particularly those in the lower and middle school, contribute willingly to the wider community through charitable events, such as the making of food hampers and cards for residents in care homes and the shoe-box appeal at Christmas. However, apart from a few exceptions, such as a Year 4 pupil raising money for those affected by the Australian bush fires, such activities are largely instigated by the school and not by the pupils themselves.
- 3.18 Pupils' social development is good. They are polite and courteous. There are good relationships amongst the pupils, between upper and lower school pupils, and between pupils and staff. Pupils are socially aware and readily discuss news stories in their form lessons, engaging in debate, listening well and respecting the views of others. Within the classroom pupils work well together, either with a partner or in groups. In a geography lesson in the middle school, for example, pupils worked collaboratively and listened to each other's contributions as they drew a diagram to show the path of a river. Older pupils were keen to engage in debate during a PSHE period, although opportunities for such collaborative enterprise are less frequent in this part of the school. Major contributors to pupils' social development are the residential trips for pupils in the middle and upper school, such as those to Lockerbie for pupils in Years 7 and 8, the annual ski trip and trips to France and Spain. These have not taken place for the last two years because of the pandemic, thus putting a temporary halt to the contribution such activities have on pupils' personal development, but those who have participated in the past have commented how much these trips have helped them to develop personally.

- 3.19 Pupils are well behaved and able to distinguish right from wrong. They commented that the new discipline system, which had been introduced by the school's leaders shortly before the inspection, had been successful, making behavioural expectations much clearer and leading to improvements in behaviour. In the lower school, pupils respond positively to praise and house points, and are motivated by their celebration assemblies. Older pupils demonstrate good moral understanding. For example, in three different lessons, pupils in Year 8 showed a good understanding of the changing opinions of right and wrong when investigating the legacy and portrayal of General Custer in a history lesson; showed empathy and awareness in an English lesson of the struggles for equality that occurred during the depression era in the USA; and then engaged actively in a discussion in religious education (RE) on the life of Jackie Pullinger, showing a nuanced understanding of the link between crime and poverty.
- 3.20 Pupils tackle difficult questions about spirituality during their RE lessons, producing well-written arguments on different religious topics and are well versed in the Christian tradition throughout their time at the school. Pupils said that they found RE lessons and assemblies helpful in learning about other religions. However, the broader aspects of spirituality, the appreciation of non-material aspects of life and engagement in philosophical debate are not as strongly developed. The awe and wonder expressed by children in the Reception, who were eagerly awaiting the emergence of the last two butterflies from their chrysalises, or seen in pupils in Year 3 when they entered the classroom to see the effects of the colour dye on their flowers, are less evident in the experience of older pupils.
- 3.21 Pupils' self-esteem, self-confidence, self-discipline and resilience vary widely throughout the school. Many pupils have shown great resilience and self-discipline during the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst others have seen a decline in self-esteem and self-confidence. The school's leaders have noticed the negative consequences of online learning and have sought, with some success, to reverse these trends. The school endeavours to instil these traits through its PSHE programme and to help pupils to understand how to improve their own learning and performance. In the lower parts of the school, for example, pupils are taught that it is important to try, and that it is all right to fail. However, much of the teaching and the tasks pupils are given are so carefully structured that they do not offer pupils sufficient scope to discover their limits, to push boundaries and to learn from failure. These tasks take away the opportunity for pupils to make their own decisions about how to approach a task and to use their own initiative. Pupils appreciate the help offered by their teachers and the guidance given by some when marking their work, but the quality of feedback varies so that pupils do not always have a clear understanding of how to improve their work.
- 3.22 Although there are areas for improvement in pupils' academic work, their extra-curricular achievements and aspects of their personal development, the school has continued to provide a good education and to prepare pupils well for their future education during a very difficult period in which all, both pupils and staff, have adapted previously familiar routines, traditions and practices and learnt new skills and ways of working. The school's leaders have engendered a spirit of optimism and enthusiasm amongst the staff which has seen new ideas and plans emerge to help the school re-focus on its prime aims of providing a well-rounded education and equipping each pupil to be the best they can be.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils’ work. They held discussions with members of staff and with chair of governors and the safeguarding governor, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Graham Sims	Reporting inspector
Mrs Daphne Cawthorne	Accompanying inspector (Former headmistress, GSA school)
Mr Ian Raybould	Compliance team inspector (Headmaster, IAPS school)
Mrs Emma Patel	Team inspector (Deputy head, IAPS school)
Dr Guy Roberts	Team inspector (Assistant head, HMC school)
Mrs Valerie Holloway	Co-ordinating inspector for early years (Former head of nursery and kindergarten, IAPS school)
Mrs Moyra Thompson	Team inspector for EYFS (Head, ISA school)