

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Abercorn School

Full Name of the School	Abercorn School
DCSF Number	213/6364
Early Years Number	EY389621
Registered Charity Number	N/A
Address	28 Abercorn Place, London NW8 9XP.
Telephone Number	020 7286 4785
Fax Number	020 7266 0219
Email Address	a.greystoke@abercornschool.com
High Mistress	Mrs Andrea Greystoke
Proprietor	Abercorn Education Ltd
Age Range	2½ to 13
Gender	Mixed 2½ to 11, Boys 11 to 13
Inspection Dates	26th to 29th January 2009
Head of Early Years Setting	Mrs Francesca Wrottesley
Early Years Age Range	2½ to 5
Early Years Gender	Mixed
Early Years Foundation Stage Inspection Dates	26th to 27th January 2009

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

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. The inspection was carried out by ISI, a body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting EYFS provision in schools belonging to the ISC Associations. Section 7 of this report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the EYFS Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

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

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Abercorn School is a day school for boys and girls from the age of two and a half to thirteen. The school opened in 1987 in Abercorn Place, with forty-two pupils on roll. The school is owned by a limited company with a board of directors, consisting of an independent chairman and six family members. These family members include the high mistress who is centrally involved in all matters within the school, but the day-to-day management lies in the hands of the senior leadership team (SLT). The school is situated on four separate sites, some of which are listed. The pre-preparatory school comprises the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Year 1. The classes for children in the EYFS are on their own site. In Year 1 pupils move to an adjacent site. Pupils in Years 2 to 4 are taught in a separate building which is about one mile away. Close to that site is another building that houses Years 5 to 8. Years 2 to 8 form the preparatory school. The grounds at the EYFS site and those for Years 2 to 4 consist of an enclosed play area to the back. In common with many city-based schools, Abercorn uses nearby leisure facilities for games lessons and matches. The school was last inspected in 2003.
- 1.2 The school aims to give pupils the best start in education by providing a friendly, caring and inspiring academic atmosphere. It believes in traditional values and standards. Through this framework, it strives to enable pupils to develop their individual talents and skills.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection there were 374 pupils in the school, of whom 158 were in the EYFS. There were 60 pupils in Year 1, 105 pupils in Years 2 to 4, and 51 pupils in Years 5 to 8. Abercorn pupils are drawn from the area around St John's Wood, and come from a wide range of backgrounds and diverse cultures. About a third of the pupils are from non-European cultures and 38 pupils come from European backgrounds, for example from Spain and Germany. The school has 32 pupils for whom English is not their principal language. Of these, one pupil requires support for English as an additional language (EAL) within mainstream lessons, although all receive additional learning support as necessary. Pupils are drawn mainly from business and professional families. Pupils move on to other independent schools at appropriate points in their education. Girls and some boys leave at the age of eleven whilst others leave at thirteen.
- 1.4 Pupils join Abercorn at various ages and from various pre-school and school settings. Children in the EYFS or Year 1 are not assessed on entry to the school. Pupils joining in Year 2 and above complete an assessment to ensure that they have the potential to flourish in the school's environment.
- 1.5 Standardised test information confirms that the average ability of pupils is above the national average, with some pupils well above and others below. Where they are performing in line with their ability, therefore, pupils will achieve results in the national tests at the age of eleven that are above the average for maintained primary schools. The school has identified twenty-three pupils as requiring some degree of learning support. None of these has a statement of special educational needs.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.
- 1.7 See Section 7 for the report on the Early Years Foundation Stage.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The educational experience provided is of good quality and fulfils the aim of the school successfully. Good progress has been made since the last inspection.
- 2.2 A rich curriculum incorporates effectively the linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative elements of learning. In the EYFS, pupils progress through the six areas of learning and make a good start in the acquisition of skills to achieve the Early Learning Goals. From Year 1 religious studies (RS) and personal, social and health education (PSHE) are taught in addition to all National Curriculum subjects, and higher up the school the curriculum leads on to the Common Entrance syllabus. French is studied from the Nursery onwards and classical studies is introduced as a subject during Year 5. Numeracy and literacy skills are well developed and are used effectively across subjects. Pupils enjoy the opportunities provided in class and other activities to develop their particularly good speaking and listening skills. Although pupils have adequate opportunities to develop information and communication technology (ICT) skills, the planning of the curriculum as a whole does not provide regular opportunities for pupils to use the skills they have learned across the range of subjects. There is a varied programme of sports activities, both in lessons and in after-school clubs. At present few opportunities are provided for pupils to compete in competitive matches. Changes since the last inspection have seen good development in the planning in year groups and in the provision for music. Younger children benefit pastorally from having a class teacher who teaches them for many subjects, and all pupils' learning is enhanced by the expertise and enthusiasm of specialist teaching staff in many subject areas.
- 2.3 Pupils' experience of PSHE, enhanced by the leadership programme for those who are older, reflects the school's aims and ethos, and is enriched by a wide range of good extra-curricular activities. Provision includes sporting activities such as swimming, football, netball and tennis, choirs, and other clubs such as cookery, drama and Mandarin. These are greatly appreciated by both boys and girls, from a young age. Children in the Nursery much enjoy playing in their walled garden and developing their physical skills. A wide range of visits, such as trips to the Science and Natural History museums and a residential stay in France, give focus to literacy, historical and geographical studies. In addition, trips to the theatre and to a newspaper education trust broaden pupils' cultural and social experiences. Involvement in giving concerts in the church hall for the community and local charities indicates the good level of social responsibility the pupils feel for their local community, and visiting speakers, such as the Touch Africa Charity, help to focus pupils' awareness of the needs of others abroad. All pupils in the school have equal opportunity to be successful within the range of activities provided.
- 2.4 Abercorn prepares pupils very well for each stage of their education within the school and for the transfer to the senior schools of their parents' choice. The move from the Nursery to the Reception class is relaxed and progress through the rest of the school is similarly well organised, with teachers clearly prepared to receive their new charges and where appropriate, help them settle into their new site. As a result of thorough preparation for entrance examinations, most pupils enter a school of their choice, some with academic and other awards.
- 2.5 Curriculum planning and associated policy documents are of a high quality. They are thorough and detailed, and facilitate coherent and progressive learning throughout the school. Teachers with associated responsibilities monitor the implementation and impact of curricular decisions. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection.

- 2.6 The school meets the curricular needs of all those pupils requiring learning support. Annual assessments include a variety of standardised tests and highlight pupils who may benefit from extra support. Pupils are tracked carefully and a specific programme of help is drawn up following discussion with parents. This extra help is provided by teachers and classroom assistants. However, there is no overall screening programme, and no specialist learning support teaching is available in school. The programme for gifted and talented pupils is in its early stages of development. Provision for the most able pupils is good overall.
- 2.7 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.8 Pupils are well educated and they achieve good standards in relation to their age and ability. They gain a thorough grounding in knowledge, skills and understanding of English, mathematics and science. These high standards of learning and achievement have been maintained since the last inspection. Pupils are given opportunities to develop their individual talents and skills, in line with the school's stated aim. In all age groups, pupils acquire effective ICT skills but as yet have only limited opportunities to apply these in other subjects.
- 2.9 Pupils achieve well in all areas of learning by the time they leave the Early Years Foundation Stage. The basic skills are learnt most successfully by these young children. Pupils' ability to think and act creatively and critically is demonstrated well. A Year 1 pupil in cookery club commented: "the egg-wash must be put on first so that the breadcrumbs stick onto the chicken", and in an ICT lesson Year 8 pupils were able to discuss website design constructively, identifying key aspects and debating their relative values and impact.
- 2.10 Pupils develop effective skills and display a positive attitude towards work and study. They show outstanding levels of articulation and listening, and respect the opinion of others, whether in the classroom or in more informal situations. For example, Year 4 pupils revealed a wide range of vocabulary and a capacity for logical and independent thought as they discussed differences in cultures and communities. Expression and use of technical phrases by pupils in Years 7 and 8 were excellent during an English lesson on Abraham Lincoln. Standards of creative writing and reading are good throughout the school. Pupils demonstrate very good mathematical competence, showing a variety of skills which include developing their own strategies for problem solving. A Year 6 geography class investigated thoroughly the start of World War Two using grid reference work and internet research. Highly effective teaching and well-planned lessons mean that pupils' knowledge and understanding are developing successfully in almost all areas.
- 2.11 No significant difference is apparent in the relative attainment in separate classes within the same year group, across subjects or between pupils of differing abilities. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), as well as those with EAL, achieve at a level that is commensurate with their abilities. Overall, more able pupils and those identified as being gifted and talented also make good progress, given their ability levels.
- 2.12 Results in national tests taken at the age of eleven are good in relation to pupils' abilities. Pupils' performance over the last three years has been well above the average found in maintained primary schools in English and science, and in mathematics, far above. Pupils spend time before examinations for their senior schools revising and attempting practice papers, and this contributes to their good results. The pupils' good achievement in their time at the school is underlined by the high standard of entry of many of the schools to which the pupils transfer when they leave Abercorn.

- 2.13 Pupils achieve well in a range of areas. Swimming is a clear strength; regular success has been achieved at the London Schools Championships, and individual pupils have represented London North at the Independent Schools Association National Swimming Championships. All pupils are given the opportunity to represent their houses in a range of inter-house competitions, for example on sports day, in the swimming gala and in cross-country running. Annual drama productions, from the Nursery to Year 8, give every member of the school the opportunity to perform. The various enthusiastic and talented choirs sing regularly for the school and in the community. For the past three years the senior choir has sung at the switching on of the Christmas lights on some of London's most famous roads. The ensemble group performs at the annual Children's Trust Concert at the Royal Academy of Music. Associated Board music examination passes have doubled in the past three years. Participating in these activities enables the pupils to develop personally, particularly contributing to the development of their confidence, understanding of team responsibilities, and support and respect for each other.
- 2.14 Pupils organise both themselves and their work well. This was clearly seen in a Year 6 science lesson as pupils worked together to investigate the conditions needed for a nail to rust. The presentation of pupils' work is consistently good, and shows clear progress since the last inspection. They work hard and study effectively both on their own and co-operatively with others. They take notes and draft work effectively. Good levels of communication and team work were seen across a range of subjects. During the fitness aspect of their games session, pupils in Years 7 and 8 were seen to be actively encouraging and supporting others, whilst also being happy to explain work to each other. Pupils are keen to settle at the start of lessons and show a willingness to learn. Year 4 pupils were attentive and eager to contribute their experiences of overseas trips in a PSHE lesson. Pupils show a high level of determination and perseverance across a range of subjects, regardless of difficulty. Pupils take pride in the quality of their work. The enthusiasm and enjoyment of the pupils are evident in all areas of the school: in the classroom, undertaking activities, travelling between sites and at break times.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.15 The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good, reflecting clear progress since the last inspection. In some aspects of their personal development pupils reach high levels. Respect for others and an appreciation of people's differences are experienced and developed in the day-to-day life of the school.
- 2.16 Pupils' spiritual awareness is well developed and they are aware of the spiritual nature of human beings. They show self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as increasing self-knowledge, being able to identify their own characteristics. Pupils come from a wide mixture of social, ethnic and religious backgrounds but they are aware that individuals are distinctive and should be respected. It is this that enables them to work and play together in harmony. Pupils reflect thoughtfully on issues and themes that are raised about the meaning of life; for example they took part in the two-minute silence at the Remembrance Day service in the local church. They take advantage of the many opportunities in RS and PSHE lessons to explore values and beliefs, including religious beliefs, and the way they affect people's lives. In a Year 7 RS lesson, pupils reflected on the practice of fasting, which helped them to appreciate what it is like to feel hungry and to understand that fasting is a form of self-discipline.
- 2.17 Pupils show a strong moral commitment. They clearly know the difference between right and wrong, and understand that the rules they drew up in class exist for the benefit of the school community. They raise a considerable amount of money for a local charity that provides wheelchairs and also for the Touch Africa charity, which helps provide clean

drinking water for children. Such involvement, both locally and further afield, demonstrates pupils' care and concern for those less fortunate than themselves.

- 2.18 Pupils show good social development. The school provides many useful opportunities for them to learn to play their part in the community. They take on responsibility in the pre-preparatory school by acting as monitors, whilst in the preparatory school they act as house captains and prefects, and respond well to their teachers' high expectations. The house system and the newly formed school council enable pupils to show their initiative and work together. Elements of citizenship, including knowledge of public institutions and services in England, are included in the PSHE curriculum. Guest speakers are regular visitors to the school and include local spiritual leaders, health workers, and representatives of the police force. Such experiences help prepare pupils for adult life.
- 2.19 Pupils' cultural development is outstanding. They show thorough understanding of the cultural diversity in Britain today, and make highly effective use of that which exists in the school. For example, both parents and pupils have given presentations about their religious celebrations and culture, and Chinese New Year and Australia Day were celebrated in the pre-preparatory school. Experiences of the music, art and literature from other cultures are included in the curriculum, supported by visits to places of interest such as a Hindu temple. In a Year 6 RS lesson on Judaism, pupils prepared intelligent questions to ask the rabbi prior to a visit to a synagogue. Pupils learn successfully about British culture from an early age through the opportunities they have for visits, or through involvement in a range of traditional pastimes. For example, Year 1 had fun when they made pancakes for Shrove Tuesday and decorated cakes for St Valentine's Day. Good use is made of London's theatres, museums and art galleries.
- 2.20 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.21 The quality of teaching is consistently good and a significant proportion is outstanding, promoting good progress made by pupils. Staff have excellent relationships with their pupils and teaching throughout the school very successfully promotes the aim to provide a friendly, caring and inspiring academic atmosphere, so maintaining the standards of the previous inspection. The school's systems for assessment and individual target setting are good. These are considerable improvements since the last inspection.
- 2.22 In the EYFS, staff know the children well and provide good support for their learning and development. In the rest of the school, teaching is well planned to meet the needs of all pupils using an appropriate variety of activities. The best lessons provide a high level of academic challenge, matching demands to suit the ability of the pupils and extending the most able. In these lessons pupils are totally absorbed and enthusiastic. In a Year 5 art lesson, pupils gave outstanding responses to the interpretation of two pictures by Picasso, and in a Year 3 history lesson pupils were very articulate in expressing their thoughts about gladiatorial fights and the story of *Androcles and the Lion*. When teaching is less successful it is often characterised by a lack of planning of suitable activities for pupils of different abilities. Individual educational plans have been written for pupils identified as having LDD and good staffing ratios ensure that these are used effectively.
- 2.23 Good opportunities are provided for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. Paired tasks for oral mathematics at the start of lessons encourage pupils to set challenges for each other and they participate with great enthusiasm. Occasionally however, teaching does not allow enough scope for independent enquiry and research. Restricted access to the

- library and to the internet limits opportunities in this area. Carefully targeted, open-ended questions are often used by teachers to encourage pupils to think for themselves about the task they have been set.
- 2.24 Teachers encourage their pupils to behave responsibly and enjoy their learning by translating their own enthusiasm for their subject into lively and stimulating lessons in which pupils learn and achieve very well. In a Year 2 English lesson, excellent planning of targeted activities led to an enthusiastic response from pupils when working on their spelling strategies. Teachers' planning is thorough and time during lessons is managed carefully throughout the school.
- 2.25 Teachers know their pupils' aptitudes and needs well and use appropriate questioning techniques at the start of lessons to check that prior knowledge is secure before moving on to the next stage of learning. They have a thorough knowledge of the subjects they teach and their explanations are clear. Carefully directed specialist teaching, for example in mathematics and music, contributes significantly to the good progress made by pupils. Teachers encourage pupils to ask questions. Pupils' responses are treated with respect and praise, and teachers sometimes allow for extensions to the original lesson planned. For example, in a Years 7 and 8 mathematics lesson on bearings, a sensible question from a pupil led to discussion about how to construct a parallel line using a ruler and set-square.
- 2.26 Good use of interactive whiteboards was observed in some lessons and appropriate resources are available to support teaching. Classroom assistants are deployed effectively and are fully involved in supporting the teaching of the class. Adequate equipment is available for ICT but limited use is made of this in all the subjects of the curriculum. Good use is made of nearby sports facilities to support learning.
- 2.27 Assessment is good and in some areas outstanding. Pupils' work and understanding are assessed regularly, in lessons through questioning and by testing and marking of classwork and homework. The progress of pupils from the end of Year 1 is tracked effectively using standardised tests in English and mathematics, and tests of spelling, reading, verbal and non-verbal reasoning. A system to track pupil attainment in other subjects is now being implemented. In some subjects pupils are helpfully encouraged to assess themselves after each piece of work, using a 'traffic lights' system to inform both the pupil and the teacher whether they have fully understood the topic. Marking of pupils' work is inconsistent. In the best examples, teachers use frequent praise and constructive ideas for improvement but where the marking is less good, pupils are given insufficient feedback on how to progress. A very thorough analysis of national tests and other assessment results has collected useful data to inform planning and target setting.
- 2.28 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care is good and has been maintained since the last inspection. This helps the school to fulfil its aim of educating children in a friendly environment in which they can flourish. Suitable care is also taken for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils except that required staffing checks have not always been completed. The site is managed by enthusiastic and dedicated staff who contribute to the overall care of the pupils.
- 3.2 Staff throughout the school provide strong support and guidance for all pupils. A comprehensive set of pastoral care arrangements is in place, in the form of: clearly written policies, monitored in staff meetings and supported by an effective house system; a friendship token system; a buddy system; a prefect system for older pupils. The recently formed school council provides a useful forum for ideas to be put forward by the pupils. Outstanding examples of pastoral care were seen during registrations where pupils felt valued and part of the community. Some pupils expressed concern in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire that they were not given enough responsibilities, but the inspection team judged that sufficient opportunities are available.
- 3.3 The staff work hard to ensure excellent relationships with the pupils and the pupils display a friendly confidence in their relationships with adults. Pupils feel comfortable going to either teaching staff, assistants or non-teaching staff with a concern, should the need arise.
- 3.4 Measures to promote good discipline and behaviour are good. Good behaviour is promoted successfully through rewards such as house points, certificates and a termly prize. There is a clear home-school agreement which the high mistress, parents and pupils all read and sign. The school employs a number of sanctions to reinforce its rules and these are applied consistently. An effective anti-bullying policy highlights appropriate topics and has been supported by an anti-bullying week. The high ratio of adults to pupils on all school sites clearly has a positive effect upon the overall quality of pastoral care and ensures excellent supervision.
- 3.5 Staff in the EYFS and throughout the school take care to promote pupils' welfare, health and safety satisfactorily. Child protection procedures are suitably stated in a good policy, but the procedures outlined have not always been consistently implemented. Checks for references and previous employment history are not always appropriately carried out on a very small number of staff. Rigorous systems are in place for the collection of pupils at the end of the school day. The school's commitment to the *Every Child Matters* agenda is evident in notices around its sites, encouraging pupils to share their concerns. Safety is emphasised in lessons. For instance in an ICT lesson, there was much discussion with the pupils on internet safety. Arrangements for pupils who are feeling unwell are inadequate at all sites of the school as they do not include access to a washbasin. All staff receive first aid training and those trained to a higher level are quickly identified on the named posters around the school.
- 3.6 All necessary measures required to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken. Fire safety arrangements are thorough. Risk assessments have been undertaken in relation to all areas of school life and electrical equipment is checked appropriately for safety. Health and safety meetings are held regularly. Admission and attendance registers are maintained correctly. Pupils are supervised very effectively throughout the school day.

- 3.7 Pupils are encouraged to be healthy through developing healthy eating habits and taking regular exercise. From the Nursery onwards, all pupils are offered nutritionally balanced food. International days provide variation and introduce pupils to typical menus from other countries. Pupils and staff frequently eat together and this allows staff to encourage good manners and behaviour.
- 3.8 The school has an appropriate plan for improving its accessibility to pupils with physical disabilities and conforms to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.
- 3.9 The school meets most of the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) fully implement its policy for child protection [Regulation 3.(2)(b)].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.10 The school has maintained good links with parents and worthwhile links with the wider community that support its aim to provide a friendly, caring and inspiring academic atmosphere.
- 3.11 Parents are strongly supportive of the school. Their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire was very positive. They rated highly the quality of teaching, the progress made by their children and the high standards of behaviour. A few parents expressed concern regarding the support given to pupils with LDD, the work completed at home, information received and opportunities to discuss progress. The inspectors examined each of these concerns and concluded that the school's provision was appropriate. The majority of parents indicated that any concerns they may have are generally dealt with promptly and effectively.
- 3.12 Parents expressed their appreciation of the many opportunities to be involved in the activities of the school and in the work and progress of their children. They emphasised their support, saying how much they valued the extra contact that they now have through the Friends of Abercorn (FOA), which provides an excellent link between parents and staff. The FOA arrange a number of successful fund-raising and social occasions. Parents attend sporting events, drama productions, musical concerts, and special celebrations at harvest festival and Christmas.
- 3.13 Parents are kept informed through good quality information. The parent handbook provides valuable material. As pupils are admitted at any time during the school year, parent induction takes place throughout the year to ensure that they are fully informed about day-to-day routines and the curriculum. The school website includes helpful information, as does the weekly newsletter. The use of email contact between the school and parents is being developed.
- 3.14 Information about their children's work and progress is shared with parents on a regular basis. The school has an open-door policy and parents can very easily contact the heads of the pre-preparatory and preparatory schools. Parents have daily contact with class teachers in the pre-preparatory school, and the homework diaries are a useful means of contact in the preparatory school. Reports are issued three times a year. The format of these has improved since the last inspection. They are now more detailed and indicate levels of attainment, and those that include targets for improvement are most helpful. Parent/teacher meetings are held twice a year and additional curriculum meetings occur as appropriate.
- 3.15 The school promotes positive links with the local and wider community. Pupils sing and perform in the local parish churches, and last summer the school and one of the churches held a very successful joint summer fete. A number of people visit the school, including

religious leaders and a Member of Parliament. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 are directly involved in community charity work. In 2008, the school raised money for the provision of wheelchairs. This involvement encourages pupils to reflect on the needs of others and impacts positively on their personal development. They also maintain strong links with their sister school in New York. The school has a good relationship with the local authority and with a number of independent school cluster groups which have been particularly helpful in offering advice, benefiting the educational development of pupils.

- 3.16 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Improvements made since the last inspection indicate that the board of directors takes its duties and responsibilities seriously. It helps to set and secure appropriate aims and values, and provides sound oversight and guidance. However, it has not always ensured the full implementation of its child protection policy. The chairman has an enthusiastic commitment to the school and regards his role as an important means of supporting the high mistress, the SLT and the staff in their work.
- 4.2 Financial oversight is maintained through regular meetings of the executive board, a small working group of the board of directors and the bursar. This continues the practice of previous years and works well. As a result, the school benefits from effective educational provision and appropriate investment in resources. Arrangements are clearly defined and generally support oversight of the school. However, the school does not have a written strategic plan regarding its long-term vision to help set a clear educational direction for the future. The board of directors meets once a year to agree educational development and financial planning.
- 4.3 The board of directors fully understands its responsibilities, including monitoring standards to judge whether the school is meeting its stated aims. Duties such as those related to health and safety are mostly discharged effectively. The provision for the EYFS setting was unregistered at the time of the inspection but the executive board and the high mistress have actively sought registration for it. Outside professional advice is regularly obtained to assist the board.
- 4.4 The executive board members are alert to everything happening in the school, and encourage every member of staff to give of their best for the benefit of the pupils. The high mistress holds many informal meetings with the chairman to discuss school matters.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 Overall, the sound standards of the last inspection have been maintained. Good progress has been made in supporting the school's aim to give pupils the best start in education by providing a friendly, caring and inspiring academic atmosphere. In response to the last inspection, a director of studies has been appointed and subject co-ordinators and heads of department have increased responsibility.
- 4.6 Under the leadership of the high mistress, the heads of schools and the SLT work successfully to ensure that the ethos of the school is applied across the school community. Leadership and management of the EYFS are good. The school's recently formed leadership team have more defined roles, and a clear educational direction and sense of purpose are being quickly established. This is reflected in the excellent relationships with the pupils, the warm and friendly environment and the quality of care.
- 4.7 Almost all staff are responsible for some degree of curricular or extra-curricular management, and a strong sense of unity exists among them. They are keen to work together productively in order to contribute to the school's educational direction. Much effort is made to ensure both formal and informal contact between the pre-preparatory and preparatory schools, incorporating regular and frequent meetings of staff. This provides opportunities to generate educational vision from each phase of the school. The resulting one-year school development plan is of a good quality. It provides a good basis for development in the

immediate future but, as the school is aware, does not serve as a comprehensive framework underpinning strategic planning for whole-school development in the years ahead.

- 4.8 Good policies and procedures cover many aspects of school life and systems are in place to check the effectiveness of these and of the school's practices. Health and safety issues are immediately followed up. However, not all policies are fully implemented; marking is not always consistent and not all appropriate staffing checks are carried out. Heads of department are responsible for developing, monitoring and reviewing subject policies and practice, and have provided a very good framework for all aspects of the curriculum. Monitoring of teaching and learning is well established and ensures that heads of department have a highly useful, whole-school perspective of the development and progress of pupils in their subjects. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection.
- 4.9 Teaching and non-teaching staff provide strong support for the school's ethos and aims, to the advantage of the care, welfare and education of the pupils. The school has recently developed an effective cycle of annual appraisal for its teaching staff and this is linked appropriately to the good provision of in-service training. Staffing levels are generous and enable strong support to be given to the pupils. Staff checks are recorded centrally. In most respects, procedures ensure that suitable staff are appointed to the many and various roles within the schools. However, in relation to a very small number of staff taking extra-curricular activities in the EYFS and pre-preparatory school all the necessary checks have not been carried out on their references and previous employment details. All those currently working in the school have satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau certificates. The arrangements for enabling newly qualified teachers to achieve qualified teacher status are comprehensive. Induction procedures for staff new to the school are clear, support them effectively and are appreciated.
- 4.10 Procedures for budgeting operate very efficiently. The buildings are well maintained. Accommodation and resources, including the outdoor space, are adequate overall and are used appropriately in most areas. However, as the school is aware, the libraries and ICT suites are frequently inaccessible, restricting the opportunities for their use by the pupils and staff to fully support the educational experience. Facilities for those who are unwell do not include access to washbasins. Communication with parents, staff and pupils is effective, and the administration of the school is efficient. Maintenance and catering staff provide good support for the school.
- 4.11 The school meets most of the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff [Standard 4]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) ensure that checks are carried out to confirm in respect of each person appointed references and previous employment history [Regulation 4.(2)(a)].
- 4.12 The school meets most of the regulatory requirements for premises and accommodation [Standard 5]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) ensure that there are appropriate arrangements for providing accommodation for pupils who are taken ill [Regulation 5.(1)].
- 4.13 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 The school has many strong features and is successful in fulfilling its aims. Provision in the EYFS is good and is effective in meeting the children's needs. A wide-ranging curriculum is provided throughout the school with many opportunities for pupils to learn and achieve well. Extra-curricular activities are good and further support pupils' educational development. Well-planned teaching enables pupils to achieve high standards in many areas across the curriculum and to perform well in entrance examinations to their senior schools. ICT is not used consistently to support the educational experience fully. Pupils' personal development is good and well supported by the care given by all members of staff. The school has good links with parents and with the local and wider community. The leadership of the high mistress, ably assisted by the heads and the board of directors, is sound, as is the management of the school. The EYFS setting was not registered for children under the age of three at the time of the inspection. This has now been addressed. The school development plan does not currently provide a strategy for the long-term vision of the school. Procedures for staff appointments and arrangements for pupils who are feeling unwell are not fully compliant with the regulations. The SLT are aware of these areas for improvement.
- 5.2 In response to the recommendations at the last inspection the curriculum has been broadened, and the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation of their work are now consistently good. The quality of assessment has improved significantly, and it is used well to support planning and to track pupils' progress. The monitoring of teaching and learning is a priority for the school and the resulting information has been used well to enable effective short-term planning.
- 5.3 The school complies with most of the regulatory requirements, but has not fully met Standard 3 (the welfare, health and safety of pupils), and for the same reason, Standard 4 (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors) and Standard 5 (premises and accommodation).

Next Steps

- 5.4 In order to plan for the future and to strengthen some aspects of its provision, the school should:
1. develop pupils' capacity for research by extending opportunities for them to use their ICT and library skills across the curriculum;
 2. extend school development planning beyond one year to underpin the long-term vision for the school.
- 5.5 In order to meet all the regulatory requirements, the school must:
- (1) ensure that recruitment procedures are followed rigorously, and that checks are carried out to confirm in respect of each person appointed references and previous employment history [Regulations 3.(2)(b) and 4.(2)(a)];
 - (2) ensure that there are appropriate arrangements for providing accommodation for pupils who are taken ill [Regulation 5.(1)].
- 5.6 Any failures to meet EYFS requirements are detailed in Section 7.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 26th to 29th January 2009. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.
- 6.2 The Early Years Foundation Stage was inspected on 26th and 27th January 2009 by two inspectors. The inspectors observed sessions, talked to the children, examined samples of work, and held discussions with staff and governors. Comments from parents and carers were considered, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mrs Sara Wiggins	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Valerie Goode	Assistant Reporting Inspector
Mrs Deborah Buckenham	Head, ISA school
Mr Ben Moir	Head of Department, IAPS school
Mrs Janice Priddle	Former Head, GSA school
Mrs Pam Simmonds	Head, ISA school
Mrs Linda Hudson	Early Years Lead Inspector
Mrs Vivien Tabone	Early Years Team Inspector

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

- 7.1 The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), at Abercorn is located in a converted, five-storey Victorian residence in Maida Vale and has a small but well-planned outdoor play area to the rear of the building. The setting is part of the Pre-preparatory school which is located at Abercorn Place. The EYFS consists of a Nursery, which runs a separate morning and afternoon session, four Pre-Reception classes and three Reception classes, with a maximum of twenty in any one class. There were one hundred and fifty-eight children on roll in the setting at the time of the inspection. Provision for children aged two and a half had not been registered with Ofsted at the time of the inspection visit. This provision was therefore not inspected. Since then, registration has been obtained. The inspection was for children from the age of three to five years. Nine children were identified as requiring learning support and nine were receiving support with English as an additional language (EAL). The children benefit from specialist teaching in some areas of the curriculum including music, physical education (PE) and French, which is taught from Nursery onwards.
- 7.2 The overall effectiveness of the EYFS is good. All children, including those with EAL and those who require learning support, make good progress and some make very good progress, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Most attain the Early Learning Goals before the end of Reception. They play and work well both independently and with others. They demonstrate a good understanding of their learning and were very willing to share this with the inspectors. They are able to make choices, from the selection offered to them, and have excellent relationships with both adults and peers.
- 7.3 The children behave in a safe and responsible manner at all times. The school provides excellent lunches and pays due regard to the cultural and dietary requirements of the staff and pupils. Meals are tasty and well balanced, and are prepared and cooked on the premises. Good use is made of fresh ingredients from local suppliers. The children enjoy their meals, demonstrate an excellent understanding of eating to stay healthy and have adopted very good hygiene practices. Children come from many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds which are celebrated in the curriculum and in the daily life of the school, as was seen in the entrance hall display, the Chinese New Year celebrations and the photographic evidence of a multi-cultural celebration at the end of the Michaelmas Term. Children play and work exceedingly well with their classmates, respecting each other's differences and cultural diversity. They are articulate in expression and listen carefully to each other and to adults, responding well to instructions. They are motivated and very enthusiastic. Children learn about the wider world through their topics, as with 'London attractions' in Reception and 'People who help us in the community' in Pre-Reception. However, as the school is aware, the use of information and communication technology is not yet well established.
- 7.4 The staff are hard working, enthusiastic and dedicated, and they plan and organise most areas of the curriculum thoroughly. Excellent planning and practice were observed in the Nursery. However, curricular planning does not offer equal time and status to the six areas of learning in the Pre-Reception and Reception classes. Opportunities for child-initiated and independent learning activities are also sometimes limited. Teaching is good and some observed lessons were outstanding. Children with EAL or with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given excellent support and are integrated successfully into the school community. All adults are deployed effectively, to promote the learning of each child. Parents are encouraged to be active in their children's learning by participating in a home-school agreement and by sharing their own expertise where relevant.

- 7.5 The promotion of the children's welfare is satisfactory. The policies and arrangements for safeguarding children are good in most respects except that they have not been fully implemented with regard to staff taking extra-curricular activities. Thorough risk assessments are carried out regularly and effectively. The health and well-being of the children are strongly promoted through positive reinforcement and leading by example. The children are well supported by their key person and all staff are totally committed to enabling the children to develop socially and educationally. Within the confines of a listed building, best use of space has been made to provide a suitable learning environment, both indoors and outdoors. The building and grounds are maintained and managed well. Resources are used effectively and efficiently, and together with furniture, are assessed constantly for suitability and damage. The school has excellent links with parents and addresses any concerns quickly. The majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire were extremely positive and their comments were very favourable. A very small number raised concerns about communications but the inspectors found no evidence to support this.
- 7.6 All the adults in the setting are suitably qualified and have appropriate Criminal Records Bureau certificates. However, all the necessary checks have not been carried out on references and previous employment history for a very small number of staff taking extra-curricular activities. Staffing ratio is above requirements and staff work together exceptionally well as a team to provide high quality care and education. The school has a realistic twelve-month development plan, and several improvements have been made over the last few years which have taken into account the views of children, parents or carers, and staff. All staff have been trained to NVQ level 3 or above.
- 7.7 Since the last inspection, subject co-ordinators and a director of studies for the EYFS have been appointed. The introduction of a website has enhanced home-school communication and a wider range of clubs is now on offer. Since the last Ofsted inspection, the children's singing and use of percussion have been greatly improved by the employment of a specialist music teacher.

What the Setting Should Do to Improve

- 7.8 To improve the good quality of its provision, the setting should:
1. ensure that planning and implementation of the curriculum are consistent across the six areas of learning;
 2. ensure that planning provides for more opportunities for activities initiated by the children themselves in order to improve independent learning further.
- 7.9 In order to meet the requirements of the EYFS the setting should ensure that:
- (1) recruitment procedures are followed rigorously, and that checks are carried out to confirm in respect of each person appointed references and previous employment history.

Complaints Since the Last Inspection

- 7.10 Since the last inspection, there have been no complaints made to Ofsted which require any action to meet national requirements.