

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Arnold House School

Full Name of the School	Arnold House School
DCSF Number	213/6034
Registered Charity Number	889424
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Age Range	5 to 13
Gender	Boys
Inspection Dates	23rd to 26th February 2009

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009.

The 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 Arnold House School was founded in 1905 as a boys' preparatory day school. It is run as an educational charitable trust and a limited company and is administered by a board of governors. The school is situated in St John's Wood, in north-west London. The school acquired its own playing fields, the Arnold House Activity Centre, at Canons Park in Edgware in the early 1990s and a refurbishment of the buildings was carried out in 2005.
- 1.2 Since the last inspection in January 2003, numbers have remained stable. Developments since that inspection include: the construction of a theatre, two field work rooms, an all-weather pitch accommodating six tennis courts and the installation of interactive whiteboards with internet access in classrooms throughout the school.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection there were 257 boys on roll, aged between 5 and 13 years. In the junior school there were 141 boys with 74 in Years 1 and 2, known as the pre-prep, and 67 in Years 3 and 4. In the senior school (Years 5 to 8) there were a further 116 boys.
- 1.4 The school has identified 25 pupils who receive additional specialist help usually in mathematics or literacy. Two pupils have a statement of special educational needs and receive additional support and equipment funded by a local authority. Nine pupils do not have English as their principal language and although most are fluent in English, additional support is given so that they are able to access the full curriculum.
- 1.5 Most pupils live within a short distance of the school in the St John's Wood, Hampstead, Maida Vale, Regents Park and Primrose Hill areas, although some come from as far afield as Holland Park, Highgate and Islington. In addition, pupils come from a variety of backgrounds, with the majority having parents who work in professional occupations or businesses of all sizes and who strongly support their children's education and want them to be successful.
- 1.6 Entry to the school at the age of five is not on a competitive basis. However, the school does follow a stated admissions' procedure. For pupils seeking admission at an older age, a number of tests are used to give a profile of attainment and aptitude and to assess the pupils' suitability for the school. The pupils cover a wide spectrum of ability, though their average ability is above the national average. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results will be above the average for all maintained primary schools.
- 1.7 All pupils in recent years have been successful in transferring to their chosen senior school, with some gaining music, sport, academic and all-rounder scholarships and exhibitions.
- 1.8 The school aims to provide a supportive family ethos in a relaxed and friendly way within a defined code of conduct. It seeks to be academically strong, with each boy developing his talents and successfully transferring to a senior school that is right for him. It strives to create a balance between the academic, artistic, pastoral, spiritual and sporting aspects of a boy's development. It also aims to ensure that boys are well rounded, well mannered and well motivated by enabling them to have time to mature at their own pace. In addition, it seeks to create an environment in which individuals are cherished and valued as well as providing a foundation for pupils' personal development within a tolerant Christian ethos.
- 1.9 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The school provides a particularly high quality educational experience for all its pupils, with some outstanding features. This is in accordance with its aim that academic potential should be strongly developed, commensurate with pupils' ages and abilities. Since the last inspection a broad and balanced curriculum has been maintained and developed and the introduction of the 'Compass Course' in Years 5 and 6 has significantly improved pupils' opportunities for independent learning.
- 2.2 Across the school, emphasis is placed on providing pupils with an excellent range of curricular activities that contribute to their linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development. By Year 8, excellent levels of literacy and numeracy are achieved through the delivery of a well-planned curriculum. Opportunities for developing speaking and listening skills are particularly good, as was demonstrated by two senior pupils who gave high-quality speeches in a debate about Barack Obama.
- 2.3 The planned curriculum is very good with many areas of excellence and, as a result, pupils benefit greatly from its variety, breadth and balance. In Years 1 to 4, all National Curriculum subjects are taught, in addition to religious education and French. A library period is also added. Overall, the curriculum is well balanced for these year groups, although there are some minor anomalies in the time allocated to some subjects, particularly English. All National Curriculum subjects are taught as discrete subjects in Years 5 to 8, except for design and technology, which is incorporated in an art and design course. In addition French, Latin, a library period and religious education are also added. Information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 5 and 6 is taught as part of the Compass Course, whilst Greek is taught to some boys in Years 7 and 8.
- 2.4 The educational experience pupils receive contributes effectively to the good and in some cases outstanding progress made in their learning. The acquisition of reading and writing skills is particularly good. For example, Year 8 pupils produced high quality written book reviews and the work of pupils in all year groups benefits significantly from the excellent use made of the library.
- 2.5 The programme of ICT throughout the school is also good and in some instances is outstanding. Many subjects use ICT in their curriculum achieving a good standard in lessons and within the computer suite. The Compass Course has resulted in exceptionally good ICT work. All pupils have access to a range of sports, through physical education and games. Every pupil who wishes to has regular opportunities to represent the school in competitive games. Many pupils choose to join the junior and senior choirs, including those with broken voices. The senior choir, for example, sang a challenging piece in several parts most enthusiastically and made an excellent contribution to the Ash Wednesday church service.
- 2.6 The range of extra-curricular activities is excellent. Enthusiasm for the clubs' programme was resoundingly given in interviews with both junior and senior pupils. A carefully thought out clubs' policy supports the school's aim to create a healthy balance between academic, artistic, pastoral, spiritual and sporting aspects. For example pupils performed with enjoyment, and to a high standard, in an orchestra practice.

- 2.7 Enrichment of the curriculum is also extensive within the school environment, in the local area and through visits and speakers. A carefully planned policy for school trips enables pupils' educational experience to be enriched by a range of excursions that support learning in a number of different subject areas. Opportunities are also provided to undertake voluntary work, such as through the garden pupils designed for a local hospice and visits they make to talk to residents at a local assisted-living residential home.
- 2.8 Pupils are well prepared both academically and socially for the next stage of their education. The school is very successful in enabling pupils to access places at academically demanding selective senior schools. In addition, Year 8 pupils develop life skills and learn to work both independently and as part of a team during their 'challenge week' in Cumbria.
- 2.9 The curriculum overall is carefully planned and developed logically in order to extend pupils' skills and knowledge. The recently revised schemes of work and policy documents are generally of good quality. The documentation helps to ensure the progressive and continuous development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills as they move through the school. The absence of a discrete personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) lesson in the senior school limits the opportunity pupils have to discuss issues relating to personal and social development.
- 2.10 Since the last inspection the learning support department has significantly improved provision for pupils who experience difficulty with their learning. Those likely to experience learning difficulties are identified early in their school career via teacher assessment and the analysis of test data. If necessary, individual education plans (IEPs) appropriate to their needs are drawn up. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) in the classroom is generally good and teachers plan adequately for the individual's needs. Exceptionally good support is given to classroom teachers by the head of learning support and the special needs team. Good support is also given to the small number of pupils for whom English is not their first language. The needs of pupils identified as being particularly able are generally well catered for, as is evident in the academically selective senior schools to which many gain places and the range of high quality opportunities designed to develop pupils' gifts and talents in areas such as art, music and sport.
- 2.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.12 In both their academic and broader education pupils achieve exceptionally well. As a result, the school meets its aim of helping pupils to be academically strong, achieve their full potential and transfer to the senior school that is right for them. Pupils also enjoy their work and apply themselves very well to it. They attain high levels of knowledge, skill and critical and creative understanding in the subjects they study as well as in activities outside the taught curriculum. They also develop well their essential skills and attitudes to work and study. The good standards of learning and achievement, found at the time of the last inspection, have in many areas been most successfully built upon.
- 2.13 In Years 1 to 4, pupils learn to read and write with increasing confidence and enjoyment, making significant progress in both areas. Firm foundations are also put in place for pupils' mathematical development, the outcome being that by the end of Year 4 pupils have a considerable confidence with numbers. Effective teaching and well-planned lessons mean that pupils' knowledge and understanding are developing successfully in almost all areas. Pupils' ICT skills are also maturing very appropriately as they progress through Years 1 to 4. Encouraged by their teachers, pupils use their imagination and creativity well and apply these to many of the subjects they study, for example in art and music.

- 2.14 During their time in Years 5 to 8, the very successful start pupils have made earlier is appropriately built upon. They become well able to apply their rapidly expanding skills and knowledge to different situations and to a variety of subjects. This is particularly noticeable in their written work and in the outstanding work produced in Years 5 and 6 as part of their 'Compass Project'. Pupils make very good progress in Years 5 to 8 and, as a result, are well prepared to continue their education in their chosen senior school.
- 2.15 By the time pupils reach that transfer point, at the age of 13, they achieve exceptionally high standards in many areas of the curriculum. In addition, they have speaking and listening skills that are highly developed for their age. They are articulate, confident and converse easily with adults and with their peers. Their levels of creativity are exceptionally good, particularly in their investigative work, as well as in their writing generally. The very high standards being reached in music and art in particular ensure that pupils' creative and critical skills are being well developed. Similarly, pupils at the transfer age use mathematical and ICT skills very well, most notably in those subjects to which they are most easily applied such as mathematics, Latin and music. This was seen in an outstanding Year 8 music lesson where pupils were required to work in pairs to compose a piece of music. They used a sequencing program to create music using virtual instruments and loops, based on a given chord progression and improvised melody. Pupils achieved excellent standards of musical composition which were enhanced as a result of their well-developed ICT skills.
- 2.16 No significant differences are apparent in the relative attainment of different groups of pupils. Those pupils who need additional help, as well as those pupils for whom English is not their principal language, make very good progress towards the targets identified in their IEPs. Overall, pupils identified as being gifted and talented also make appropriate progress, given their ability levels.
- 2.17 At the age of seven, pupils do not take externally moderated National Curriculum tests. Consequently it is not possible to compare their achievements with other seven year olds in maintained primary schools. However, evidence collected during the inspection indicates that high standards are being achieved in reading with good standards being achieved in writing and mathematics. The school is well aware that, in line with the national picture, boys' writing standards are not as high as the standards they achieve in other aspects of English. As a result, the school is taking appropriate steps to ensure that their pupils do attain the highest standards of which they are capable.
- 2.18 Pupils' results in National Curriculum tests taken at the age of 11 are high for their abilities. Pupils' performance over the last three years has been far above the average found in maintained primary schools in English, mathematics and science. Work seen in lessons during the inspection confirms these test results.
- 2.19 The high standards found at the age of 11 are maintained in Years 7 and 8 so that by the time they leave the school results in Common Entrance and scholarship examinations are exceptionally high. In 2008 all pupils gained entry to their first choice senior school, several with accompanying scholarships. These include academic awards, as well as those for sport, music, art and all-round performance. The overall very high achievement levels are indicative of the significant progress made by pupils in many areas of the curriculum, during their time at the school.

- 2.20 Given the number of pupils on roll, the school has a first-rate list of individual and team achievements in a variety of areas. Of particular note is sport where the under-11 soccer team were unbeaten during last season, whilst in cricket two of the school's excellent First XI were chosen to represent Middlesex. In music, over 100 pupils successfully passed Associated Board examinations with one in eight gaining distinctions and over a third gaining merits. A small number of boys were selected to sing in the New London Children's Choir, with others playing instruments with the London Schools' Symphony Orchestra. In other areas, success has been achieved by representatives of the school winning a City of London ICT and geography competition, the Townsend-Warner Preparatory Schools History Prize and the Junior Painter of the Year competition, and with many pupils having their art work published in a contemporary design magazine for children. Perhaps the most significant achievement came when the school won the final of the national 'Kids Lit Quiz' before going on to become world champions later in the year. Whilst the school is rightly proud of the successes of individual pupils as well as its representative teams, care is taken to ensure that less skilled pupils have equal access to coaching and tuition and therefore have the opportunity to compete at a level appropriate to their ability.
- 2.21 Pupils' attitudes to work and study are outstanding. Throughout the school pupils use a good variety of skills in their work. For example, the Compass Course in Years 5 and 6 enables boys to produce, amongst other things, leaflets, software presentations and newspaper reports across different subjects and also develops their independent learning skills.
- 2.22 Right across the school, pupils work hard and study effectively, both on their own and with others. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson, pupils worked in pairs and involved themselves in peer assessment. Independent work is undertaken in a variety of subjects. For example, in a Year 1 phonics lesson, pupils worked effectively to find as many words as they could that began with a particular sound.
- 2.23 Across all ages, pupils settle down quickly and apply themselves effectively to the task they have been set, be it at registration, the start of lessons or in games and activities. Pupils enjoy their studies. Their concentration levels are high and they show great enthusiasm for their work and activities. In a library lesson with Year 4 pupils for example, the pupils gasped in 'awe and wonder' when reminded of World Book Day and at the prospect of buying books from local bookshops. Their time-keeping and sense of urgency when moving from one class to another is indicative of their enthusiasm and their most positive attitudes to their learning.
- 2.24 Pupils organise their work and studies effectively and they are confident of their teachers' regular help in this area. As a result they progress well and attain high standards. Pupils clearly love coming to school and they greatly appreciate the learning experiences they are offered.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.25 The provision for pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils demonstrate an exceptionally well-developed moral, social, cultural and spiritual awareness. No formal PSHCE programme is in place but there is evidence of the provision for PSHCE in curriculum areas such as science and religious education and in the junior school through the medium of circle time and the social, emotional aspects of the learning programme. Raising pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence is a major priority of the school and is evident in the various awards, badges and certificates that celebrate the pupils' achievements, efforts, behaviour and citizenship. The secure atmosphere in which pupils feel appreciated and in which they have a strong sense of moral values, enables them to be considerate and responsible members of the school community.
- 2.26 Pupils' spiritual awareness is excellent and is well fostered through school assemblies and church services. During Remembrance Day services and on trips abroad to the battlefields, a 'Book of Names' of past pupils who died during the two world wars is carried and allows for a moment of spiritual reflection. Another book naming all past pupils is taken to church at all services to allow for further reflection on the history of the school. The cultural diversity, personal interpretation and creativity evident in art and music, results in an experience of awe and wonder both from the pupils and their audience. The debating opportunities in the senior school provide an excellent forum for reflection on moral and philosophical issues.
- 2.27 As with spiritual development, the provision for pupils' moral development is also excellent. Pupils develop a strong moral awareness and are able to distinguish the difference between right and wrong from an early age. They respect the values of the school rules and appreciate the necessity for them. They understand the reward systems and value very highly the awards for their efforts. Assemblies on themes of kindness and the 'Golden Boy' award encourage pupils to develop self-discipline and peer awareness.
- 2.28 Pupils' social awareness, in terms of their position as members of the school and also of the wider community, is outstanding. Pupils are encouraged to help one another and peer assessment provides a good opportunity for co-operative and sensitive interaction. Pupils play very well together at break times and interact positively with one another. They take part in many fundraising events such as 'Send a Cow', in support of small-scale farmers in Africa, where they track the progress of their efforts and receive feedback from the charity about progress being made. In addition, they are also involved in supporting a local hospice where they have designed the hospice garden and have direct contact with the patients.
- 2.29 Pupils' cultural awareness is also outstanding and they have excellent opportunities to learn about and appreciate their own and others' traditions. Parents are invited to talk in lessons or assemblies about festivals. On celebrating Mardi Gras, pupils demonstrated a very thorough understanding of its history and customs. Art also promotes a good understanding of other cultures, and school trips are made to various galleries. In addition, pupils take part in musical activities such as choirs and instrumental ensembles.
- 2.30 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.31 Teaching is very effective and on many occasions is outstanding. Such good quality teaching enables pupils to achieve well and encourages them to achieve their full potential in line with the school's aims. The generally good quality teaching found by the previous inspection has been maintained and successfully built upon in many areas.
- 2.32 Where teaching is at its best, teachers expect a great deal from their pupils and use many successful teaching techniques to interest and motivate them in their work. In most lessons teachers create numerous opportunities to enable pupils to expand their knowledge and understanding of a subject or particular skill. Also, teachers successfully encourage pupils to learn and think for themselves through the clever use of tasks and questions that they set at levels that are appropriate to their pupils' ages and abilities. This was particularly noticeable in a Year 4 geography lesson where pupils, through an initial review of previous lessons, were quickly reminded of the conditions needed for thunder and lightning to occur. This was re-enforced by the excellent use of a video depicting a thunderstorm. Very good questioning and the particularly good use of the video to reinforce the teaching points being made, ensured that considerable learning took place and high standards were achieved.
- 2.33 All through the school, teachers manage their pupils' behaviour well and enable them to express themselves in a variety of ways. Teachers' own subject knowledge is of significant quality. Consequently, the carefully planned lessons leave pupils in no doubt as to what they are expected to do as well as what they are required to learn. Most lessons proceed at a good pace and effective use is made of the time that is available.
- 2.34 Very successful lessons are also characterised by the way teachers involve their pupils in a range of activities. This might include discussions as well as practical or theoretical work. In most subjects, including science, history, French and physical education, pupils are enabled to increase their learning by being required to work in small groups or pairs, in order to discuss and exchange ideas with each other and to produce high quality pieces of work.
- 2.35 Where teaching is not so successful it is usually because there is a lack of variety in the work pupils are required to do or that the pace of the lesson is too slow to maintain the pupils' interest sufficiently. On occasions also, the work set does not provide sufficient challenge for particular groups of pupils. As a result, pupils lose concentration and their learning is limited.
- 2.36 In much of the teaching, high-quality relationships, largely based on mutual respect, exist between pupils and their teachers. Consequently, pupils feel confident in being able to express their views, opinions and ideas in a positive way. Teachers know their pupils well and, in the best practice, give sensitive help, particularly to those pupils with LDD or those who have English as an additional language. In these cases pupils' needs are well recognised and are appropriately addressed.
- 2.37 Teachers make good use of the school's stock of high quality resources. The good support given by teaching assistants in the classes where they are based enables pupils to make significant gains in their learning. Material resources are carefully selected to assist pupils' learning and understanding. Particularly good use is also made in many lessons of ICT to further enhance and support pupils' learning.
- 2.38 The library, as well as other teaching rooms, has very good stocks of books and other resources that are again well used by teachers as aids to help pupils' learning and understanding.

- 2.39 The school's assessment procedures are good. In the best lessons, the assessment of work is outstanding, encouraging pupils to reflect on their learning and to seek to improve. For example, the peer assessments of compositions undertaken in a Year 8 music lesson enabled very good progress to be made. Peer review is also a regular part of many art lessons.
- 2.40 The school has established good systems to track pupils' attainment against national norms in order to evaluate whether they are meeting expectations. Assessment is also used effectively to identify pupils requiring additional support as well as those who are academically strong. The school has developed good procedures to enable assessment information to be used to inform teachers' planning for individuals and groups. An effective scheme for tracking pupil performance across the school has been adopted, notably by the mathematics department.
- 2.41 Wide variations occur in the way individual subjects use the school's marking policy in assessing pupils' knowledge and understanding. Consequently, the excellent marking practice found in some subjects is not followed by all. In examples seen of excellent practice, teachers influenced pupils' progress by setting realistic, achievable targets for improvement. However elsewhere, marking does not show pupils how to improve their work and on some occasions is barely satisfactory.
- 2.42 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. Both teaching and support staff provide good quality care for pupils right across the school and show strong regard for their welfare, health and safety. This is a similar situation to the one found at the time of the previous inspection. The school fulfils its aim of providing a supportive family ethos whilst operating in a relaxed and friendly way within a defined code of conduct. Pupils clearly feel happy and secure both with their peers and the adults who support them. As a result, the pupils are enthusiastic, confident and articulate. They are polite, pleased to greet visitors and help when they can. The school is also successful in ensuring the welfare, health and safety of its pupils.
- 3.2 The staff are assisted by effective pastoral arrangements and, although the school does not have a separate document for pastoral care, the staff are guided by a handbook which provides clear guidelines regarding pupil welfare and child protection. Form tutors are effective in dealing with pastoral issues as are the heads of year to whom more serious issues are referred. Effective records are kept so that pastoral problems can be tracked. Pupil issues are always part of the agenda in staff meetings.
- 3.3 Teachers promote pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem through a wide range of activities. Some of these are based at the school's activity centre which is imaginatively used for activities including leadership and team building. Assembly debates are a regular feature of school life and a group of Year 6 boys spoke on the topic of 'Books which should not be missed' for twenty minutes. The ability to articulate feelings and personal issues is encouraged in circle time in the junior part of the school. However, such opportunities do not similarly exist through a structured programme in the senior school. Many school policies are subject to review in the school development plan. At present the school's pastoral policy is not subject to the same cycle of review.
- 3.4 The relationships between the staff and pupils are excellent. In interviews the pupils expressed a strong element of mutual respect for the staff. When asked during lunch what he liked best about the school, a Year 5 pupil without hesitation said, "The staff!" On the whole, pupils knew which adult they would seek out if they had a problem and they all felt that the school's anti-bullying policy was taken most seriously.
- 3.5 Relationships between pupils are good and mutually supportive. For example, Year 2 pupils cared well for each other when one of them was hurt when playing. Similarly, biscuits were readily shared after art club and in a Year 6 religious studies lesson mutual respect for different religious beliefs of the pupils was very evident.
- 3.6 Discipline and behaviour policies concentrate on positive targets and rewards and not just sanctions. The school in its documents and in its practice has very high expectations of pupils regarding behaviour. This is reinforced by a system of awarding badges for citizenship and achievement. Pupils appreciate the many badges they can earn and they wear them with pride. Pupils of all ages are outstanding ambassadors of the school. All pupils are ready to open doors for visitors, from a heavily laden five-year-old who dashed to a door to assist, to older pupils who invariably offered a "Good morning" to visitors.

- 3.7 Measures to safeguard and promote pupils' health and well-being are secure and known by all. Teachers carefully alert pupils to risk in subjects such as science and art and design. Child protection measures are fully in place. The school policy documents regarding child protection are clear and all staff are subject to checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. Pupils are well supervised. Fire prevention measures are in place and regular; recorded fire practices are held throughout the school. Playground supervisors and members of the administrative staff deal effectively with minor illnesses and injuries. Two members of staff are available for expert first aid advice. They are supported by six other staff first aiders spread throughout the pupils' age range. Comprehensive risk assessments are undertaken throughout the school and most thoroughly for the many expeditions and visits.
- 3.8 Pupils are encouraged to be healthy by the provision of well-balanced menus and a very full sports programme. The Mardi Gras special lunch and dining room decorations were part of a regular programme of themed lunches. Special dietary requirements are catered for.
- 3.9 All parts of the school are happy and safe places where pupils are free to express themselves in accordance with the aims of the school. Pupils feel valued and that they have an individual part to play in a busy, large community.
- 3.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.11 The quality of links with parents and the community is outstanding. As a result the school achieves its aims in this area. The school has made significant progress in developing its links with both parents and the community which, at the time of the previous inspection, were found to be good overall.
- 3.12 Parents, in response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, showed a high degree of satisfaction with areas such as teaching, their child's progress, the curriculum, the attitudes and values the school promotes and the quality and range of the extra-curricular activities that are available. The main areas of concern raised by parents were the amount of information they received about their child's progress, the lack of adequate provision for special educational needs, the pastoral help and guidance their children received and the way the school handled concerns. The inspection findings show that the provision for special educational needs has been greatly enhanced since the last inspection and is now good. The pastoral help and guidance the children receive is also good and the information parents receive about their child's progress is sufficient, given the other opportunities that are available.
- 3.13 Parents are offered many opportunities to be involved with the life of the school, for example when attending new parents' events, curriculum evenings and other social events, as well as giving talks at assembly and to particular groups of pupils. All events are well supported by a high proportion of parents. Prospective and new parents are particularly well provided for. Furthermore, at home most hear their children read and support them with homework. At curriculum evenings, parents are given guidance about homework and information is also provided on the school website. Homework is monitored by heads of year and homework diaries are appropriately used. All pupils have homework diaries that are well organised. Parents also attend one parents' evening a year.
- 3.14 The school has a very effective system for communicating with parents. The detailed and regular letters and newsletters, the prospectus, handbooks, magazine, website and notice boards, all help to provide them with up to date information about what is going on and what has happened at the school. The progress reports sent out at the end of each term are of a

good quality, highlighting what pupils do well and often including suggestions for what they need to do to continue to improve. Parents also receive an interim report with grades each half-term.

- 3.15 Parents are welcome to speak to staff at the beginning and end of each day and can contact the headmaster directly if they have concerns about their child's welfare. The school also sends questionnaires to parents at the end of each school year, regarding their views about various aspects of school life. These are then analysed and action required is taken where appropriate. Most recently, the lack of drama and special educational needs provision were concerns which are now being addressed effectively. Those concerns which require action are incorporated into the school strategic plan and school development plan.
- 3.16 Parents' concerns are handled in a sensitive manner and in a way that follows regulatory guidelines. A formal complaints procedure is in place, although no formal complaints were received from a parent in either this year or in the last one.
- 3.17 A variety of outstanding links with the local community helps to enrich the lives of pupils and the community at large. Sporting fixtures and visits to local sports clubs are good examples of this. The outstanding facility the school has at the Canons Park Activity Centre is being continually developed; for example, pupils from local maintained schools visit the park to use the centre, as do the Edgware Safer Neighbourhood Police Team and Watford Football Club. It is also used for a variety of community meetings and by other local groups. The pupils have also played their part by planting bulbs in the park grounds for the Friends of Canons Park, a community group.
- 3.18 Other examples of outstanding quality links with the local community include the pupils taking part in a competition to design a new garden for the St John's Hospice which they will continue to plan and look after. Pupils also perform musically at a local residential home and Year 8 pupils have, of their own account, been very involved in a local night shelter project, linked to their religious education studies. Pupils have also visited local hospitals and the London Fire Service has visited the school. In addition to this, the school raises money for a wide variety of charities locally, nationally and internationally. In relation to 'Send a Cow', the pupils were consulted and voted for which charity to support, based on some of their own presentations.
- 3.19 Speakers also visit the school from many charities to explain how the money collected has been used and the particular charity's work and projects. The emphasis here is not just on the pupils raising money, but also on them doing some community service related to the particular project. In this respect and others, the school's appointment of a development officer is intended to further enhance the already outstanding links with the community and further co-ordinate the numerous charity events, talks and projects with the pupils, parents' association and staff.
- 3.20 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The school is well governed. The committed and informed guidance of the chairman, as well as the board generally, helps to ensure that the school maintains its ethos, fulfils its aims and makes appropriate strategic plans to meet its objectives. It is clearly apparent that an overriding commitment exists to provide the very best for the good of the pupils, the school and its continuing development. The quality of governance, found at the time of the previous inspection, has been maintained and in many areas built upon.
- 4.2 The board benefits from the experience and professional backgrounds of its members, as well as from a full programme of in-service training that many of its members attend. It has a clearly defined structure with supporting sub-committees. These enable governors to have a good general oversight of the working of the school. In certain areas governors are particularly successful, notably in being aware of new requirements and securing the necessary financial resources for school development. The outcome of this is effective educational provision and on-going investment being made in the buildings, staffing and general resources of the school. Governors are not quite so knowledgeable about the curriculum offered to pupils at the school, but systems are being put in place for them to be informed on a regular basis of ongoing developments in this area. Governors have a sound oversight and awareness of both child protection issues and their responsibilities regarding health and safety, and steps are being taken to enable them to develop their responsibilities even further.
- 4.3 Governors keep in touch with the progress of the school through successful communication systems. Senior managers, notably the headmaster, keep governors well informed about ongoing issues and consequently, where necessary, they play a leading as well as supportive role to them. Appropriate systems are developing to enable governors to develop their advisory and supportive role to all members of staff.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.4 The school's senior staff provide highly effective leadership and management. Senior leadership, and the headmaster in particular, have the necessary management qualities, vision, motivational characteristics, as well as determination to enable the school to achieve as well as it does. Much of the success of the leadership and senior management is evident in the particularly high quality of education the school provides and in the way pupils are well cared for and looked after. This enables the school to realise its aims. It is also an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection where leadership and management were judged to be mostly good.
- 4.5 The school's strategy team, consisting of the headmaster, deputy headmaster, senior master and bursar, is an effective body designed to consider the strategic management and longer-term developments of the school. This is supported by a larger management team consisting of senior managers as well as representatives from all areas of the school. Its role is to consider more short-term developments and mastermind their implementation. Whilst both teams are relatively new (September 2008) their effectiveness is already becoming apparent in both the shorter- and longer-term strategic development of the school. Since the last inspection, good progress has been made in developing the roles of senior managers and, in particular, heads of department so that they have a more whole-school responsibility. All now have a clear understanding of what that role is. What is less certain is their

- understanding of how they are required to carry out that role in a systematic and structured way over a set period of time.
- 4.6 The school's strategic plan is of good quality and is reviewed annually by senior staff and governors. It rightly covers a review of the school's aims together with strategic intent and objectives related to the school's ethos, finances, buildings and facilities, education, staffing and a number of other developments. The strategic plan is well supported by an annual school development plan largely related to the educational experience pupils receive and the quality of teaching and learning. Sections in it have individual targets, identify personnel involvement and have a specific timescale. At present, however, success criteria, in-service training needs and possible costings are not specifically identified. Nevertheless, such good, detailed planning shows that senior managers are effective in analysing the school's needs, setting priorities and planning strategies in detail in order to meet whole-school targets.
- 4.7 Policies and procedures are in place to cover most aspects of school life and these are of good quality. Systems are also in place to check, as is necessary, the overall effectiveness of the school's procedures. Regular checks are made, for example on issues such as health and safety as well as child protection, to ensure that all appropriate measures are being followed. However some policies, for example that related to the marking of pupils' work, are not consistently applied by all staff.
- 4.8 Both teaching and support staff are effectively deployed. Very good staffing levels help to ensure that high quality support is given to all pupils, particularly those who need additional help to overcome their learning difficulties or disabilities. Staff recruitment is managed well and the statutory checks are made and appropriate records are securely kept.
- 4.9 New staff, including if applicable any recently qualified teachers, have an effective induction programme to support their needs. All staff have access to in-service training opportunities, although in-service training is not always sufficiently well focused on school development priorities. A good system for staff appraisal and performance management is in place.
- 4.10 Both junior and senior sections of the school are located on one large site. Good use is made of the high quality facilities it has. Teaching space is generally good and well managed and used throughout the school with much specialist teaching accommodation being available. In one or two classes, however, the space available is tight, especially when practical activities are being carried out. In addition the school has the relatively nearby Canons Park Activity Centre. This exceptional facility means that provision for outdoor games, as well for as many indoor activities such as concerts and plays, is excellent and well utilised by both staff and pupils.
- 4.11 The school has an excellent stock of high quality resources to support teaching and learning. In almost all cases these are located close to the areas where they are needed. All are exceptionally well used and managed. The library is also very well stocked and well used by staff and pupils to make a most significant contribution to pupils' learning. Budgeting procedures for the whole school operate very efficiently and the school is now beginning to consider ways of assessing value for money in relation to major budgetary spending.
- 4.12 On a day-to-day basis the school is very efficiently run, largely as a result of the good quality assistance and support provided by the administrative and other support staff. Communications within the school are effective. The school is a most welcoming place. Discussions with the pupils clearly indicated that they enjoy coming to school and are proud of it.

- 4.13 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.14 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 Arnold House School provides a particularly high quality education for its pupils. It has many strong features, a considerable number of which are outstanding. The school achieves its aims and meets the needs of its pupils. Achievement levels are exceptionally high in many subjects. In addition to the taught curriculum, the outstanding extra-curricular programme and educational visits also make a major contribution in enabling pupils to achieve the high educational standards that they do. Good quality and, on many occasions, outstanding teaching, a well-balanced curriculum, highly-effective leadership and the very good relationships that exist within the school, enable considerable achievements to be made by the pupils. In response, pupils have excellent attitudes to their learning. Pupils are well cared for and outstanding provision is made for their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Links with parents and with the community are outstanding.
- 5.2 Many of the strengths found by the previous inspection in 2003 have been maintained or built upon. Teaching is now of a good quality overall with a significant proportion of it being outstanding. The monitoring of the work of the school is now approached in a systematic manner and development planning has greatly improved. Provision for pupils with LDD has improved considerably and is now of good quality. In addition, significant progress has been made in helping pupils develop independent learning skills. Such provision is now very good. The school is aware that its marking policy is not adhered to by all staff. Staff training and the costings of school-based initiatives are not linked closely enough to school development planning.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no major weaknesses. In order to develop further the education it provides, it should:
1. ensure that an effective and consistent system is in place for the marking of pupils' work which is clearly understood by staff and pupils alike;
 2. further refine the school's strategic and development plans so that they include arrangements for both staff in-service training and budgetary expenditure.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 23rd to 26th February 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.

List of Inspectors

Mr Graham Nunn	Reporting Inspector
Mr David Bunkell	Former Head of Department, IAPS school
Mrs Anna Evans	Headmistress, ISA school
Mr Timothy Lunn	Head of Department, IAPS school
Revd Harry Matthews	Former Headmaster, IAPS school
Mr Patrick Wenham	Headmaster, IAPS school