

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Merchant Taylors' School

Full Name of the School	Merchant Taylors' School, Northwood
DCSF Number	919/6036
Registered Charity Number	1063740
Address	Sandy Lodge, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2HT.
Telephone Number	01923 820644
Fax Number	01923 845522
Email Address	info@mtsn.org.uk
Head Master	Mr Stephen Wright
Chairman of Governors	Sir Geoffrey Holland
Age Range	11 to 18
Gender	Boys
Inspection Dates	6th to 9th October 2008

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

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

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Characteristics of the School	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION	3
	The Educational Experience Provided	3
	Pupils' Learning and Achievements.....	4
	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils	6
	The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment).....	7
3.	THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS	9
	The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils.....	9
	The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community	10
4.	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT	13
	The Quality of Governance	13
	The Quality of Leadership and Management	14
5.	CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS.....	16
	Overall Conclusions	16
	Next Steps.....	16
6.	SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE	17
	List of Inspectors	17

1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Merchant Taylors' School aims to be 'a strong learning community that provides first class education in a humane and civilised environment where breadth of education is valued as much as success at the highest level'. The school aims 'to discover and develop boys' talents through a broad curriculum and a wide range of experiences and for them to grow to be independent and free-thinking members of a diverse community, develop confidence, essential skills for life and positive, morally secure values'. They want pupils to be 'happy, considerate of the needs of others, to feel valued, and to play their full part in a fast changing global society'. These aims are to be achieved by maintaining a system of pastoral care which caters for the needs of the individual, ensures personal well-being and safety, accessible advice and support, and creating a strong link between school and home.
- 1.2 Merchant Taylors' is a day school with a total pupil roll of 843 boys. Around 55 boys are admitted in Year 7 into three forms and another 100 in Year 9 in seven forms. Some of the few pupils who leave after Year 11 are replaced by new entrants. Around 165 pupils receive some fee support. The school is a Christian foundation within which a multi-faith community thrives, reflecting the broad ethnic base of the surrounding area. Pupils travel to the school from a wide catchment area.
- 1.3 Tutors are responsible for pastoral care and the boys continue with their tutor throughout their school career. Tutors are under the leadership of heads of house and the second master but they also work with the heads of section (lower, middle and upper school) on their tutees' academic progress. The eight houses also provide for further activities, many within the context of the inter-house competition.
- 1.4 The school was founded in 1561 by the Merchant Taylors' Company; it has been involved in the governance ever since. The school buildings mostly date from the early 20th century, though a building for art, biology, music, politics, economics and languages has been added more recently, together with a sports hall. The sixth form facilities are extensive. The school benefits from extensive grounds, including 60 acres of playing fields. It is conveniently placed for pupils to take advantage of activities offered in the centre of London and has links with other schools in North West and Greater London. Since the last inspection links with other schools and with the community have been extended; the school roll has increased by around 80 boys and a considerable programme of building and improvement has been undertaken, including recent additions of a new reception area, kitchens and ground staff accommodation. A second all-weather pitch is under construction.
- 1.5 Pupils are admitted by selection into Years 7, 9 and 12, and are mostly in the top quartile of ability. The quality of entry is at least on a par with the average entry to maintained selective schools and overall, performance at Merchant Taylors' allows comparison to be made with that of maintained selective schools nationally. No pupils currently need support as a consequence of English being their second language. Of the 41 pupils identified as having specific learning difficulties, up to 20 receive support from the learning support department. Almost all leavers proceed to university, some to Oxford and Cambridge.

- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following table.

School	NC name
3 rd Form	Year 7
Upper 3 rd Form	Year 8
4 th Form	Year 9
Divisions	Year 10
5 th Form	Year 11
Lower 6th	Year 12
Upper 6th	Year 13

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The quality of the educational experience provided is outstanding and fulfils the school's aims and philosophy of creating a strong learning community in which breadth of achievement is valued equally with success at the highest level in examinations. The pupils' academic success is a valuable passport to the finest university education but balanced by a stress on love of learning for its own sake. The wide range of initiatives taken by boys and supported by the staff, or vice versa, result in activities which enrich the pupils and the community as a whole both socially and intellectually. Boys also benefit from the meticulously maintained campus and buildings, which provide a learning environment of considerable beauty.
- 2.2 The well balanced academic curriculum allows each boy to make the most of his ability; and the activities of the extra-curriculum allow him to discover further interests which will sustain him in later life. Whilst retaining most of what is best in a standard subject pattern, the school provides flexibility in the option choices available for the GCSE and A level together with opportunities for enrichment and extension allowed by the pattern of early entry in some subjects. Boys gain experience in all the required aspects of the curriculum and develop the associated skills. The clear emphasis on the enjoyment of learning helps in establishing intellectual breadth and depth. Levels of literacy and articulacy are exceptionally high and verbal interactions are subtle and thoughtful. Good classroom practice and excellent extra-curricular involvement have helped music, art, drama and sport to become very strong.
- 2.3 The programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is much appreciated and enjoyed by the students. It has a protected place in the mainstream curriculum and is taught by a specialist team of eight teachers, led by a dedicated head of department. Rich elements of PSHCE are contained elsewhere in the academic curriculum, including English and drama, geography, history and economics.
- 2.4 The provision of extra-curricular activities is outstanding. Numerous and varied opportunities are provided for boys of all ages to attend clubs and societies, which provide a valuable enrichment of the classroom experience.
- 2.5 Boys greatly enjoy representing school and house in a wide range of sporting, musical and dramatic activity. Sporting opportunities are provided for all boys irrespective of ability or potential. Sport at Merchant Taylors' is strong; facilities are excellent and all teams benefit from high quality coaching. Competitive activities are well managed by houses. Many boys perform to a high level in concerts and plays. Membership of the Combined Cadet Force, which includes girls from a neighbouring school, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and the community service group, are thriving on Friday afternoons. All Years 10 and 11 pupils must opt for one of these and retention rates are high. All the activities foster leadership skills, personal responsibility, independence and decision making skills and expose students to a measure of controlled risk. Parents support these activities enthusiastically.
- 2.6 Preparation for the next stages in the boys' lives is excellent: major dedicated off-timetable events, in each of Years 9 to 13, cover a wide range of occupational areas and detail the variety of entry routes. The university advice and application systems are notably thorough. The Year 13 form groups are arranged on the basis of students' university intentions and to facilitate regular advice. Work experience plays an important part in the careers' programme

- for pupils in Year 12 and benefits from exceptionally generous support from parents and from Old Merchant Taylors' (OMT).
- 2.7 Relations with parents are strong and continuously nurtured: and the OMT connections are constructive and supportive. The effective and cohesive links with other schools, businesses and universities on a local and national scale, the warm links within the Merchant Taylors' Company family of schools and, of course, with the company itself, all help the school to fulfil its aim of looking beyond parochial bounds to laying the foundations for "playing their part in a fast changing global society". The school is clear and steadfast in its aim that pupils should help those less fortunate than themselves and is successful in achieving it; nearly 100 sixth formers volunteered for 11 places on the physically handicapped able bodied (PHAB) programme.
- 2.8 The curriculum is effectively planned and enables equality of access and opportunity for all. It is available in written form, in the staff handbook and in a wide variety of hard and electronic versions. The extra-curriculum effectively promotes participation in a wide range of activities.
- 2.9 No pupils have statements of special needs but those in need of individual learning support now have very good provision, a significant improvement since the last inspection.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.11 Pupils' learning and achievements are outstanding. They are highly self-motivated, eager to learn and show a considerable degree of critical and creative thinking. The quality of discussion in many lessons is excellent, boys are exceptionally articulate and keen to contribute in lessons and in activities; oral and aural competence is a significant strength. They have high literacy skills, read fluently and confidently produce very well constructed and cogently argued essays and other written work across a range of subjects. Considerable numerical competence was evident in a variety of subjects including mathematics, geography and the sciences, and good use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) by pupils across the curriculum. Boys show a high level of independent thought and engage in excellent research, as in Year 12 English literature investigating the social, cultural and historical context of the set texts. Their pertinent questions enhanced their knowledge and understanding. They quickly made links between topics across subjects.
- 2.12 No significant difference is evident in the relative attainment between different groups of pupils, in subjects or curricular areas; all are operating at the highest level. Although the school selects pupils of high ability in Years 7 and 9, the outcomes of boys' efforts represent excellent attainment in relation to their ability. At all ages, pupils' skills, understanding and application are well above normal expectations of pupils of similar ages and abilities. Attainment is high throughout the curriculum and extra-curriculum. The quality of art seen about the school and in the various publications clearly demonstrates the great talents of the pupils; Merchant Taylors' was the top school in the biology Olympiad and had a boy in the British team in the International Olympiad in Mumbai; six gold medals were won in the chemistry Olympiad, and in the senior mathematics challenge a number of boys were awarded merits and distinctions. One of the school's young enterprise groups managed a 400% return to shareholders and in design technology five national scholarships were won, along with a prestigious award for designing a device to make a wheelchair easier to move, which resulted in the product being manufactured commercially.

- 2.13 The school has success in public examinations as one of its aims; and has achieved this consistently over the years. Pupils perform significantly above national standards for maintained selective schools based upon data available over a three year period. Pupils obtain outstandingly good grades with percentages of A* and A grades at GCSE and of A and B grades at advanced level much higher than the averages for maintained selective schools. At A level grades are also considerably higher than the national average for maintained selective schools; in all subjects standardised measures indicate positive achievement, which are above expectations, underlining the fact that the pupils make excellent progress.
- 2.14 Pupils achieve individual and team success in many other areas, for instance in music, which is notable for excellence, as shown in the quality of the musicianship observed in Mozart's clarinet concerto in A major. Two pupils have places at the junior Saturday classes of the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music. The choral society, jointly with a neighbouring girls' school, had 215 choristers singing a Schubert Mass. Other significant achievements include work with charities and with the local community. Merchant Taylors' has the only school-based group to host a week for children with disabilities run by boys and staff in conjunction with the PHAB organisation.
- 2.15 The development of study skills is given appropriate attention in most subjects. Many pupils take very good notes and organise their work well. Some have become sophisticated independent learners before they enter the sixth form. However, in a few subjects, pupils make only limited notes for themselves and accept the notes provided for them. At the lower end of the ability spectrum boys' notes and files are less well organised, and in some cases the presentation of handwritten work requires further attention.
- 2.16 The pupils' attitude to study is strikingly positive and the quality of collaborative learning in evidence both inside and outside the classroom is outstanding. The quality of discussion in pair and group work, for example, in the analysis in Year 9 of historical sources relating to the causes of the First World War, was excellent, and in Year 7 English, boys showed a considerable degree of collaborative and independent judgement when playing the role of constructive critic and analysing each others' work. Boys are generous in their acknowledgement of the success of others but they also relish the opportunity to challenge the ideas of others and justify their own. Boys are encouraged to foster good work habits and to work cooperatively with other people.
- 2.17 Although a few pupils arrive late to lessons, they all settle quickly to task and levels of concentration are very high. Outstanding quality of application and perseverance is also evident, for instance when working individually in building relatively complicated molecular models in Year 8, when working in pairs assessing the roles of the media during a Year 10 PSHCE lesson, and when producing solutions to challenges set by their teachers. Boys apply themselves to tasks with enthusiasm; they enjoy and thrive on the variety of learning methods and on opportunities offered.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.18 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is very strong. This fulfils the school's aim of encouraging awareness in every boy of the spiritual dimension and respect for different faiths within a pluralistic society. Evidence of spiritual awareness was found in many aspects of the life of the school both within the classroom and in societies.
- 2.19 The school has Christian origins but embraces pupils of different faiths and shows great respect for different religions; Jewish and Muslim festivals are celebrated, Rosh Hashanah was the subject of a recent assembly. All boys attend assemblies and explore many aspects of their multi-faith community. Pupils benefit from a culture with clear moral values based on honesty, kindness, unselfishness and service. By exploring a range of religious beliefs, they develop confidence in and esteem for their own beliefs.
- 2.20 Pupils develop well morally; they show an ability to distinguish right from wrong and respect for the law. Pupils helped to draw up the anti-bullying policy. Moral issues are successfully debated in many parts of the curriculum, for example, the use of torture was discussed in a Year 12 English lesson. The school's aim of building awareness of major ethical, ecological and environmental issues is being successfully achieved.
- 2.21 Pupils develop well socially; they accept responsibility for their behaviour, and show initiative and understanding of how they can contribute to community life. They take an intelligent, informed and responsible interest in social issues, particularly of those less fortunate than themselves. Boys excel in local, national and international charity work. Their knowledge of public institutions and services in England is strong as evident in sixth form discussions on government and the media. Within the lively yet relaxed social mix ample opportunities exist to take on leadership roles and to participate in many diverse activities, some pupil-led, for example, a team of boys takes on the responsibility for the lighting of all drama productions.
- 2.22 Pupils develop well culturally, they acquire appreciation and respect for their own and other cultures in a way which promotes tolerance and harmony between different traditions. The school is a diverse but well-integrated community. Pupils are aware of, and able to compare the different ethnic and cultural features of British society. The Asian Cultural Society show attracts an enthusiastic audience from all ages and segments of the school. Non-Muslim boys were present at an Eid Party during inspection. The national poetry week gave the school opportunities to be involved in writing and listening to poetry, as experienced in an assembly; this produced spontaneous applause for a Year 8 pupil's reciting of his poem; just one example of how the talents of individual boys are recognised by others. Outstanding respect and appreciation for the culture of others is one of the strengths of the school.
- 2.23 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.24 The quality of teaching is strong, enabling all boys to make from good to excellent progress in all areas of the academic curriculum. The excellent relationships between teachers and boys generate an environment in which all pupils can prosper. The way boys are encouraged by the best teaching to engage in co-operative learning through conversation, mutual assessment and debate is a particular strength of the school.
- 2.25 Almost all lessons observed were at least good, and teaching in a third was outstanding. At its best, teaching defines many different and creative paths through which pupils can learn, thus enhancing their overall educational experience. Use of smart-boards, computers, or audio-visual aids was a significant feature of the best lessons though some, equally good, made no use of technology. Teachers are free to explore and adopt their own teaching-styles: an excellent reflection of the freedom and breadth of vision encouraged by governance and management.
- 2.26 Improved provision for those with specific learning difficulties is found in schemes of work, lesson plans and mark-books. Teachers exhibit good awareness of dyslexic and dyspraxic needs and are sensitive in the classroom to those whose learning is affected by them. A specialist teacher is available to give additional help and, when appropriate, attends lessons.
- 2.27 Teachers and boys benefit enormously from excellent rapport and enjoy mutual respect and shared educational aims. They generate and sustain intellectual seriousness and academic ambition alongside physical and creative effort. Those few lessons which exhibited a strongly didactic style using closed questioning and dictation of notes were more than counter-balanced by others in which brilliantly versatile questioning, a wide variety of methods, and an inclusive, collaborative style of learning created genuine intellectual verve and excitement. Of particular note were some excellent lessons utilising paired and group exercises, others that encouraged pupils to explain and defend their interpretations to their peers, and yet others that were enriched by the incorporation of material that pupils contributed.
- 2.28 Teaching encourages boys to behave well, incorporating high expectations of the respect boys show for one another, their tolerance of errors made by their peers, their enthusiasm to participate, and their universally positive attitude to learning. Teachers usually orchestrate and facilitate discussion, encouraging players who are willing participants in a collective enterprise.
- 2.29 Teaching is very well planned and lessons are usually pitched at a level and in a way that demonstrates teachers' deep appreciation of the needs and aptitudes of their pupils. On a tiny number of occasions teachers did not pick up the needs of their pupils adequately and failed to introduce a crucial concept with sufficient care but concepts were usually introduced in a way that greatly facilitated the learning-process and boys were able to deal confidently with unfamiliar and exciting ideas.
- 2.30 In almost all lessons observed the teaching was empathic, multi-dimensional, varied and enriching. Pupils appreciate the willingness of teachers to provide additional help for those in difficulties; the ability to email teachers with questions, for example, if homework proved too difficult, was particularly appreciated. Boys' academic programmes are accommodated even to the extent of putting on extra classes for those whose choices cannot otherwise be timetabled.

- 2.31 All teaching demonstrates at least adequate and frequently excellent command of the subject-matter which illuminates and enhances the learning of pupils well beyond the requirements of the syllabus. Even in those few lessons that did not engage adequately with the difficulties the boys were having, teachers were never at fault in their command of the subject-matter.
- 2.32 Teaching is very well resourced in accommodation of a high standard: rooms are usually sufficiently large to facilitate varieties of configurations of furniture to support different teaching strategies; appropriate stimulus material decorates the walls; and most rooms have well-used smart boards. ICT provision has been greatly enhanced since the last inspection report and is now used extensively and to very good effect, for example in art. Insufficient response to increases in numbers studying a particular subject, and occasional lack of geographical cohesion and identity are the only criticisms of departmental accommodation. Continuing professional development as a resource is often very good but is not deployed equally effectively across departments.
- 2.33 The best assessment is outstanding and exemplary. Marking, when well done, is encouraging and critical, painstaking and accurate, predictive and evaluative. Classroom assessment is direct, respectful, encouraging, interactive and thoroughly positive; it informs curriculum development and planning appropriately. In a significant number of cases, noted in the work scrutiny undertaken by inspectors, neither the quantity of marked work nor the quality of the marking was sufficient to make the most of the educational opportunities afforded or demanded by the work and the abilities of the pupils. The marking policy in the staff handbook is admirable but the considerable variation in practices show that this policy is not universally adhered to nor adequately monitored.
- 2.34 The school makes sensible and careful use of both internal and external measures of pupil performance and potential. A database has been developed which helps teachers to monitor pupils' progress. Setting is used to good effect together with differentiated early examination entry in French and mathematics, to ensure that pupils' progress is commensurate with their abilities and underlying potential.
- 2.35 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 outstanding quality of pastoral care throughout the school achieves the aim of answering boys' needs as individuals and supporting the development of their personality and character. At the last inspection the school had outstanding pastoral provision and it has continued to improve. The school is aware that further development of more rigorous monitoring procedures will help the school IT achieve its aims more completely. The boys and their parents speak very highly of the support provided by a very effective system.
- 3.2 Tutors are at the heart of the system, which includes form teachers, heads of section, heads of house, the second master and other members of the management team; all contribute to high quality of care and support provided for all the boys. The complex matrix for pastoral care is heavily reliant upon effective communication between staff, parents and the boys themselves; that it works really well was evident in the excellent rapport observed in tutor groups and classrooms. Boys remain in the same tutor group throughout their school career. Tutors meet them at least weekly, offer excellent help, advice and guidance at every stage of a boy's time at the school and maintain good links with parents.
- 3.3 Boys are efficiently registered at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions, usually electronically, sometimes by form teachers and sometimes by tutors or in houses. Registration time is well used by some form teachers to help pupils especially in their earlier and later years. The central maintenance of attendance registers is carried out very well by the staff in reception, to whom all late boys report. The school admission records are properly maintained in the head master's offices.
- 3.4 The relationships between staff and pupils are most positive and mutually respectful throughout the school. Most boys said in interviews that they have someone they can approach for confidential personal, even though the pupil survey produced some negative response.
- 3.5 The boys also get on well with each other and the relationships across and within the age groups are warm and supportive. Senior pupils commented on how they 'looked out' for the younger boys in their tutor group. Boys take a pride in the achievement of others in and outside the classroom.
- 3.6 The quality of careers and higher education advice is exceptional. Sixth formers benefit from form groups based on their UCAS need. They receive a detailed and personal programme of comprehensive guidance on university entry and application, including a well-attended higher education evening.
- 3.7 Pupils expressed their appreciation of the extra time given by staff to help, support and promote their interests and education, both inside and outside the formal curriculum; particular reference was made to the opportunities made available for them to experience a wealth of school expeditions, trips and visits.
- 3.8 Teachers' expectations of good discipline are high and a very good standard of behaviour is the result. Most pupils confirmed that sanctions are consistent, firm and fair and they clearly understand what is expected of them, though a few were negative in the questionnaire.

- 3.9 Measures to guard against bullying have been carefully drawn up after consultation with the boys and staff. Whilst a minority responded negatively to the item in the questionnaire which asked whether pupils' views were listened to, those interviewed during the inspection said that any issues raised would, where appropriate, be dealt with promptly and appropriately. The well-run school council, chaired by the head master, and the sixth form committee provide good forums for pupils to present their views.
- 3.10 The school has excellent policies and procedures for the protection of the children. All members of teaching and support staff receive appropriate training. All are recruited under the safer recruitment processes and current procedures are rigorous and effective. Criminal Records Bureau checks are thorough. The designated senior person ensures proper monitoring of these procedures and his role is being extended.
- 3.11 The measures to promote and safeguard the health, safety and well-being of the boys are well established. Teachers are made aware of acute medical problems. The excellent health centre, staffed by the two qualified nurses, caters well with emergencies and other medical matters. Boys can visit when they need help or advice and say they are always welcomed. They have the services of a professional counsellor, available one day per week, but not all pupils are fully aware of these services. Excellent first aid training is given to all relevant staff and more than adequate cover is always available. A duty nurse is on site for sporting and other major events.
- 3.12 Effective measures are in place to minimise the risk from fire, including fire risk assessment and for regular testing of appliances and emergency evacuation arrangements. Electrical appliances are properly tested.
- 3.13 The school makes strong endeavours to keep abreast of the constant changes in health and safety legislation with the help of external consultants and the nominated governor, who keeps the governing body well informed. Measures are in place to ensure proper compliance with regulations. Members of staff are appropriately trained in the safe use of the equipment required for their roles.
- 3.14 Pupils are aware of the issues surrounding healthy eating and the need for regular exercise through PSHCE, physical education and science lessons. Excellent additional information is also available from the health centre. The small number of critical comments about food, from boys and parents, were not upheld by the inspectors who found the catering arrangements good and the menu offering attractive choice and variety.
- 3.15 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

- 3.16 The quality of links with parents and the community is outstanding. The overwhelming majority of those who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire were highly satisfied with the education and support provided for their children and the manner in which the school responds to any concerns raised. The most positive responses were on the appropriateness of the range of subjects offered, the help that teaching gives to support progress, the worthwhile attitudes and views promoted by the school and the wide range of extra-curricular activities. The strong tutor system is well thought of by parents and allows for good communication between school and home. Parents say that the school is quick to follow up on issues raised.

- 3.17 The Friends of Merchant Taylors' is an active and committed organization that enables parents to be usefully involved in school life. It provides an overarching structure for a number of sub-groups which support different areas (rugby, cricket, hockey, sailing, drama music and the ladies' association); for example, the rugby group funds an extra coach for junior teams and the sailing group pays for the upkeep of boats. The committee has been consulted over issues and recently supported a change to the sixth form uniform.
- 3.18 The majority of parents consulted said they were encouraged to be involved in the life and work of the school. Support is welcomed at events and sports. The inspection team found no basis for the small number of negative responses for either parental involvement or the provision of information. Parents of pupils in Years 8, 10 and 12 are surveyed each year by the school and responses seen by inspectors were overwhelmingly positive.
- 3.19 Parents of pupils and prospective pupils are provided with regular and clear information about the school. The comprehensive prospectus and website, and the excellent *Taylorian* and *Concordia* magazines convey useful, relevant and detailed material. Well-produced handbooks, like the very clear guides on the general curriculum, GCSE and A level courses, are useful for both parents and pupils; the OMT handbook for those leaving Year 13 and the excellent handbook for pupils joining the sixth form all provide valuable information. The developing use of electronic communication is assisting the flow of information between school and home still further. One parent commented that new families were made to feel very welcome and that the school feels like a community from day one.
- 3.20 Reports are written three times a year for most year groups and grades given every half term are part of the school's regular and comprehensive reporting. These well-written reports give very clear and pertinent advice to boys and parents and this enables progress to be made. Each report contained detailed comments written by the head master or the relevant head of section. Parents' evenings take place once per year and are very well organised. A few parents requested more parents' evenings but the inspection team understands that this is impractical.
- 3.21 Of those parents surveyed pre-inspection, the majority felt that concerns they raised were well handled. Parents consider staff to be approachable, friendly and helpful if concerns are raised at a meeting or by email, and that the school's response is prompt. A thorough and clear formal complaints procedure is in place and clearly described in handbooks readily available to parents. In the year prior to inspection only one complaint was recorded formally; other issues were dealt with on an informal basis. It is intended that the complaints process will be modified so that any complaint made to a head of section or senior manager can be recorded formally to provide a more complete picture.
- 3.22 Highly positive and productive links with the wider community have been developed; a successful partnership with a local academy enables boys from the academy to study physics or chemistry post-16 at Merchant Taylors'. This partnership also provides master classes. Sixth-formers speak highly of the interview skills day organized in partnership with another school. PHAB week, a longstanding yearly event described by some pupils as one of the best aspects of school, provides volunteers to look after young people with disabilities for a week during the Easter holiday. Pupils raise funds for the holiday and a dedicated residential unit has been part funded by the OMT Society. Pupils understand the importance of community service and from Year 10 upwards, many contribute to a strong programme. Pupils speak with pride of all the worthwhile charity based activities that take place. The school's aims of pupils helping to create a better society and accepting responsibility for sharing with and caring for those who are less fortunate are clearly being fulfilled. The excellent annual charity drive, run almost entirely by pupils, raises some £12,000 for a variety of local and national charities of pupils' choosing; a highly successful charity week

brings together the school community, and a well supported MENCAP fun day is hosted by the school. It is working to develop its range of global activities further with excellent initiatives to sponsor children in Togo and Senegal and to provide support for a school in Ghana.

- 3.23 The school makes the large and beautiful grounds available to community organizations; a local primary school uses the facilities and a graduate assistant from Merchant Taylors' helps them with the provision of games. Saracens rugby players carry out pre-season training with school players; Middlesex U21 cricket teams train, and the county holds second team matches, at the school.
- 3.24 The development office has made a promising start on fundraising for bursaries to meet the aim of enabling pupils to attend the school from families who would otherwise be unable to afford the fees.
- 3.25 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 quality of governance is outstanding. Significant changes have occurred in the structure of governance since the last inspection and these have added to the effectiveness of the governors' oversight of the school. The increase to 11 in the number of governors has made it easier to cover membership of committees and other responsibilities. The school has been fortunate in securing the services of governors who are distinguished in their own fields, including education, and well-able to give advice and support. They are generous with their time and have a good record of attendance at meetings. Several governors are members of the Merchant Taylors' Company and some are old boys of the school. The company does not govern the school but it retains a close interest and provides valuable support. The head master, second master and staff representative attend governors meetings.
- 4.2 Governors' committees contribute valuable ideas for development and improvement of aspects of the school. The finance committee not only oversees financial management but helps in the planning development. The remunerations committee determines changes in a salary scale designed to ensure that the school can attract and retain good quality teachers. The curriculum committee, which includes the head master and director of studies, monitors academic progress, including examination results, most effectively. Teachers keep committee members well informed of curriculum developments through regular briefings.
- 4.3 The board and the committees are efficiently run with carefully prepared agendas and papers to support agenda items; minutes are clear and properly followed through. The termly meetings of committees and the four meetings a year of the governing body are sufficient for purpose. The head master provides a detailed report at each board meeting. The annual training day helps governors, particularly the new ones, to understand their responsibilities.
- 4.4 Responsibilities have been properly allocated which ensures that regulatory requirements are met; for instance one governor monitors the implementation of the requirements of the Children Act, and another monitors health & safety arrangements. Executive actions are properly delegated to the school managers but governors are well involved in the development planning process and the committees help with some of the detail, including financial implications and work closely with the head master and his senior management to devise strategies to ensure effective educational provision.
- 4.5 Through the strong financial management of the bursar and the finance committee, the governors provide excellent resources and facilities. The physical environment is an outstanding feature of the school.
- 4.6 The governors invest effectively in human resources and the school benefits greatly from a first-rate staff, including support staff, who show outstanding loyalty and commitment. Accommodation is available for a good many teachers. The working environment and other facilities are also attractive.
- 4.7 Governors are allocated links with school departments and activities and make regular visits to the school to follow a programme, agreed with the head master, which includes classroom observation. They also attend special events at the school. All this helps to give governors an excellent understanding of needs and practices. They play a full part in determining the aims and objectives of the school, regularly reviewing progress against these.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.8 The school benefits from excellent educational direction and leadership. The head master, now in his fifth year, has a new management team who work well together and as individuals. Apart from the senior managers, the work of middle management is carried out effectively by heads of section, heads of house and heads of department. The director of studies and his assistant oversee the implementation of excellent academic policies, which have led to beneficial curriculum development, to the successful revision of the school day, and to further development of the school's database in order to monitor pupils' progress more fully; they also focus on the sharing of good practice between departments. The outstanding examination results are just part of the benefits of quality leadership.
- 4.9 The heads of department are very able and experienced and respond well to the needs of the boys and to the lead of the director of studies and other senior managers. They monitor the performance of boys and staff within their department and carry out their responsibilities most efficiently, particularly in designing schemes of work and in the use of technology to ensure that boys benefit from high quality teaching.
- 4.10 The pastoral management structure allows for clear direction and leadership by the second master and the section heads and considerable success has been achieved in providing high quality pastoral care, supported by good discipline. Strong policies and much excellent practice were observed, though variation in practice indicates the need for more careful monitoring to ensure that all involved are rigorously following the guidelines.
- 4.11 The weekly management committee enables the school to make significant progress towards meeting its aims at both day-to-day and longer term development levels. It helps the head master in planning development and creating the right ethos, including tolerance for others, which pervades the life of the school. In particular, progress is being made towards educating high-level learners for a global society. Most major decisions and agreed priorities are achieved by wide consultation and consensus.
- 4.12 The roles of the senior management draw on the strengths of the individuals involved and these leaders have blended into a team loyal both to the school and the head master. They thoroughly analyse the school's needs as a prelude to planning changes and ensure that governors are involved. Valuable ideas emerge from the well-established range of school committees. The bursar provides an important check on the financial implications of developments and works hard to ensure that they can be funded.
- 4.13 Senior managers see that policies, set out in an excellent teachers' handbook, are properly implemented, particularly on the academic side, using a system of departmental review to monitor performance; through this they have identified the need for more comprehensive adherence to the marking policy and for the wider implementation of best practice.
- 4.14 The school is very successful in recruiting high quality staff, using new techniques to attract applications and employing graduate assistants and GAP Year students. The school participates fully in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and those involved report that it is working well. While much very good professional development is evident not all teachers are enabled to take advantage of the opportunities available.
- 4.15 The excellent work of most teachers indicates high self-motivation. Proper systems are in place to ensure that teachers, supply staff and governors are suitable for working with children.

-
- 4.16 The financial management of resources is very efficient and the excellent accommodation of the school has been further improved since the last report; plans are in place for further improvements. The bursar and his staff are well supported by the governors' finance committee. Their efforts ensure the pupils enjoy fine buildings and other facilities, including excellent sports grounds.
- 4.17 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.18 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 is achieving great success in meeting its challenging and detailed set of aims. The outstanding quality of the education at the school is largely due to excellent leadership and the dedicated efforts of the teachers. They are generous in the time and effort given to ensure that boys develop essential and secure moral values, along with notable academic success. Boys' achievements are exceptional. They develop strong self-discipline, responsibility, spiritual values, excellent behaviour, and consideration for others and emerge confident, self-motivated and well able to work collaboratively. Boys benefit hugely from the many opportunities offered by the programmes of activities, visits and tours to develop their wider talents. A complex matrix of responsibilities provides the basis for a pastoral system which ensures high quality care within a disciplined environment and attention to the needs of individual pupils. Within this scholarly community each individual is cared for and valued equally. Boys are given a very good understanding of higher education. Links with parents are good. The contribution made by pupils to the wider community is of the highest order; whether in and around the school or even overseas, boys readily accept a responsibility to care for those less fortunate than themselves.
- 5.2 The last inspection report on Merchant Taylors' School was strongly positive but improvements have occurred since, particularly in the quality of learning support. Academic results, already strong, are now even better. There is more independent learning and a greater number of instances of outstanding teaching. The curriculum and the school day have been successfully reorganised. Facilities for several subjects – economics, modern languages and music – have been improved. ICT provision, reliability, infrastructure and use for teaching, learning and administration have been considerably improved. The governance and the senior management have been strengthened. Links with the community have been extended with great success along with the school's wider charitable function.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 Merchant Taylors' is an outstanding school in all major respects but the following suggestions for improvement would make it even stronger.
1. All marking needs to come up to the standard set out in the well-defined marking policy and evident in best practice giving helpful comments to pupils irrespective of their ability.
 2. A system for monitoring pastoral care is needed which matches the successfully developing system of monitoring the performance of teachers.
 3. Good practice in the professional development of teachers needs to be extended and required of all teachers.
 4. Further efforts are needed to communicate the good practice evident in the running of some departments through all departments.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 6th to 9th October 2008. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the medical centre. 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

Dr Vivian Anthony	Reporting Inspector
Mr Christopher Barcock	Second Master, HMC school
Miss Julia Bowden	Deputy Head, HMC School
Mrs Val Garrett	Former Head of Department, HMC school
Mr Tim Fulford	Assistant Head, HMC school
Revd John Puddefoot	Deputy Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Michael Punt	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Alan Roberts	Former Headmaster, Maintained School