



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

THE PERSE PREP SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

The Perse Prep School

The pre-preparatory and senior schools were inspected at the same time and separate reports published.

Full Name of School	The Perse Prep School
DCSF Number	873/6010
Registered Charity Number	1120654
Address	The Perse Prep School Trumpington Road Cambridge CB2 8EX
Telephone Number	01223 403 920
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Email Address	prep@perse.co.uk
Head	Mr G Jones
Chairman of Governors	Mr D E Hollest
Age Range	7 to 11
Total Number of Pupils	252
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (180 boys; 72 girls)
Inspection date	16 March 2010 to 17 March 2010
Final (team) visit	26 April 2010 to 28 April 2010

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in September to October 2003.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
- (b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
- (c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) The premises and accommodation
- (g) The provision of information
- (h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

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

	Page
1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL	1
2 THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL AND ACTION POINTS	2
(a) Main findings	2
(b) Action points	3
(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements	3
(ii) Recommended action	3
3 THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS	4
(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills	4
(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)	5
(c) The contribution of teaching	6
4 THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	7
(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils	7
(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety	8
5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	9
(a) The quality of governance	9
(b) The quality of leadership and management	9
(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians	10
INSPECTION EVIDENCE	11

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 The Perse Prep School is celebrating its centenary in 2010. It was established in central Cambridge as the junior school for the Perse Upper School, and moved to its current site two miles south-west of the city centre in 1953. Together with the Pelican nursery and pre-prep school, and the Upper School, it is a charitable company limited by guarantee with a single governing body.
- 1.2 The school's aims are to encourage all pupils to achieve their academic potential, to promote intellectual curiosity, independence of mind and creativity, and to stimulate a love of learning. It aims to provide pupils with opportunities to discover and develop their extra-curricular talents and to encourage them to understand their responsibilities to others, as well as to develop a sound moral framework and an appreciation of the spiritual dimension to life. Pupils are encouraged to explore their place in the world, appreciating that they have a position of privilege, and the school aims to provide financial assistance to pupils whose families could not otherwise afford the fees.
- 1.3 Since the previous inspection in 2003 many changes have taken place. A new head has been appointed and the structure of senior management changed. New buildings and facilities have been provided. Since 2007 the school has admitted girls and is now fully co-educational, although every year group has a greater number of boys than girls. Currently 252 pupils aged 7 to 11 attend the school, of whom 180 are boys.
- 1.4 Assessment is used to select pupils for admission to the school, and the ability profile of the school is above the national average, with some year groups showing characteristics of a far above average ability profile. The majority of families have professional backgrounds. Most live relatively close to the school, and they have a diverse mix of cultural and ethnic origins. Sixteen pupils speak English as an additional language, but do not require support with English. The school has identified 45 pupils who are listed on a learning support register, and are regularly monitored. Specialist support is provided for the few who have specific learning difficulties. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL AND ACTION POINTS

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 Highly-developed skills in reading, writing and mathematics and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) contribute to the pupils' excellent standards of achievement, fulfilling the school's aim to encourage all pupils to achieve their academic potential. Pupils are confident and highly articulate. A purposeful approach to work and good behaviour help to make the school so successful. Excellent teaching enhances pupils' learning and enables their rapid progress. A recommendation from the previous inspection regarding identification of the most able pupils has been met, but a better co-ordinated approach to monitoring the provision for these pupils would now be beneficial.
- 2.2 The personal development of the pupils is excellent. Great importance is attached to welfare, health and safety, supporting their personal development. Pupils are aware of the needs of others. They are proud to attend this school, are supportive of all that the school does and the ways in which teachers enable them to learn. Some pupils made astute and perceptive comments in the questionnaire, for example some carefully-reasoned opinions about the school becoming co-educational. Overall they like being at the school and most think that it is well run. A typical comment in the questionnaire was "This is my favourite school and I like being here."
- 2.3 The governors are highly committed to the success of the school, give excellent support, and have overseen most effectively a period of considerable change. The school is excellently led and managed, with senior managers working highly effectively as a team. In the questionnaire, most parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the education and support that is provided, and the ease with which they can communicate with the school. They have many opportunities to become involved with the work and progress of their children, and their contributions are welcomed and valued. The recommendations from the previous inspection regarding the monitoring of teaching, marking work, and extending the senior management team have all been met.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school did not meet all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003, as subsequently amended, and therefore it was required to:

- ensure that all necessary checks are completed and fully recorded for staff recruited from overseas before appointments are confirmed [Regulations 4.(2)(b) and (d), under suitability of staff and proprietors];
- for the same reason, ensure that the safeguarding policy is always fully implemented [Regulation 3.(2)(b), under welfare, health and safety].

2.5 At the time of the final team visit, the school had rectified the above shortcomings, as noted in the text of the report.

(ii) Recommended action

2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Monitor and co-ordinate more consistently the provision made for the most able pupils.
2. Improve the range of extra-curricular opportunities and the levels of participation.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

- 3.1 Standards are excellent, and pupils show outstanding levels of progress, in accordance with the school's aims of encouraging all pupils to achieve their academic potential, to promote intellectual curiosity, independence of mind and creativity, and to stimulate a love of learning. Attainment at the age of 11 is excellent when compared with the national average for maintained primary schools. Pupils make exceptional progress over time in relation to their ability profile.
- 3.2 Pupils demonstrate creativity and independence of mind, for example when Year 4 pupils designed board games in a personal, social and health education (PSHE) lesson based on Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. Further evidence of creativity is seen in the pupils' inspirational art work displayed around the school.
- 3.3 Mathematical skills are very strong, and highly developed for the age of the pupils. In a Year 6 science lesson, pupils drew a line of best fit on their graphs following a practical investigation. Information and communication technology is used regularly across the curriculum, for example in French where Year 3 pupils produced a spreadsheet in French on their favourite fruit.
- 3.4 Linguistic skills are highly advanced, as shown in a Year 6 English lesson when pupils compared Shakespearean insults with modern equivalents. The level of debate at the School Council meeting was outstanding, as pupils respected and listened carefully to each other's points of view as well as presenting their own cases cogently. In the Centenary Lecture competition pupils gave five-minute lectures with the aid of presentation software, and eloquently answered searching questions on their chosen subjects.
- 3.5 Pupils achieve high standards in a wide range of activities beyond the classroom. Each year, the best mathematicians in Years 5 and 6 take part in the national Primary Maths Challenge. Pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6 participate in the World Class Tests, and all achieve either distinction or merit. An under-8 rugby team participated in the Nomura Varsity Schools Tournament at Twickenham; other recent sporting successes include the boys' soccer team's victory in a local inter-school tournament, and Year 6 girls finishing as runners-up in a local inter-school sports tournament.
- 3.6 Achievement is supported by exceptional attitudes to learning. Pupils are highly motivated, concentrating and persevering with their work, showing great enthusiasm and enjoyment for learning. They work co-operatively in groups and pairs, for example in a Year 6 science lesson when inputting data to a spreadsheet, and in a Year 6 music lesson when preparing group performances.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)

- 3.7 The curriculum is excellent, suitable for the age of the pupils and their abilities, encompassing a wide range of subjects and contributing to the school's aim to promote intellectual curiosity, independence of mind and creativity, and to stimulate a love of learning. It is highly valued by parents. Creative, aesthetic and practical experiences are important, with design technology (DT), art, music, and drama integral parts of the curriculum, and with excellent facilities for all these subjects. Provision for science is divided into natural and physical science, with a dedicated room for each.
- 3.8 Much curriculum content is beyond that expected for the age range of the school. In many subjects, pupils work on tasks expected to be for those at least a year ahead of their chronological age. For example in Year 6 mathematics, some pupils have imaginary portfolios of stocks and shares, regularly following the value of their virtual investments, and calculating profits and losses.
- 3.9 The new excellently well-resourced library provides support for the curriculum and gives further educational opportunities. Study packs can be provided for a curriculum topic, and pupils work independently using the library computers or seeking assistance from the full-time librarian. Provision for ICT is outstanding. Every classroom has an interactive whiteboard, and in addition to the main computer room the DT and music departments have their own computer suites. The use of ICT is embedded in curricular planning.
- 3.10 Extra-curricular provision is good, with clubs available at lunchtime and after school. Many musical ensembles and choirs rehearse each week, and other activities provide for academic, sporting and leisure pursuits. Although provision is good, potential exists for the provision of a wider range of activities, the repetition of over-subscribed clubs on other days, and development to maximise the school's new co-educational status. Most pupils do take part in at least one activity each week, but levels of participation are being limited by the present arrangements.
- 3.11 Community links of benefit to pupils include fund-raising for a local children's hospice. Visitors and speakers help to make pupils aware of outside agencies, and include the police, fire brigade and the NSPCC. At the time of the inspection, pupils were showing a lively interest in the imminent general election and took part in their own mock election.
- 3.12 Educational visits are arranged throughout the school year, including historical and sports trips and trips abroad. During the final inspection visit all pupils in Year 5 returned from a weekend residential trip to France, which had been a beneficial academic and social experience.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.13 Excellent teaching is a major factor in promoting the exceptional progress made by pupils, and fulfils the school's aims to encourage all pupils to achieve their academic potential, to promote intellectual curiosity, independence of mind and creativity, and to stimulate a love of learning.
- 3.14 Teachers clearly know their pupils as individuals and are sensitive to their needs. They have excellent knowledge of their subjects, and by their enthusiasm foster the interest of the pupils. Expectations are high, so pupils are able to use correct terminology; for example, in co-ordinates work in Year 3 mathematics lines were said to intersect, rather than merely cross, and in a Year 4 library lesson, alliteration and metaphor were discussed. Targets are set for pupils in every lesson, making clear the learning objectives, and the focus for the lesson. Most lessons are well-paced, making best use of the time available. Teaching assistants and technicians are deployed most effectively.
- 3.15 An array of traditional and technological resources is put to imaginative use. Interactive whiteboards are used to great effect alongside simpler equipment. For example, in a Year 3 French lesson, a projected image of Napoleon Bonaparte stimulated class discussion, hand-held pictures of animals facilitated the learning of new vocabulary as an oral exercise, after which pupils dragged the nouns on the board into two columns to denote gender. The lesson ended with a noughts and crosses game on the board, again based on the French words.
- 3.16 Work is planned with the capabilities of each pupil in mind, and further work is often provided for those who complete tasks quickly. In the best lessons the most capable are initially given more demanding work, but this is not universal, and in some cases more challenging homework is offered as an option rather than an expectation. The recommendation of the previous inspection to identify the most able pupils more methodically and then draw up effective programmes of work to ensure that they are given appropriate challenges has been met. However, there is still more to do to ensure that provision for this group of pupils is monitored and managed to best effect.
- 3.17 Written work is marked promptly, with encouraging remarks and short-term targets for future improvement, meeting fully the recommendation of the previous inspection report to improve the policy for marking work to ensure greater consistency. Formal assessment is frequent, and the data from this used efficiently to track and monitor the progress of individuals and year groups.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 Overall, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent. Their personal qualities are developed extremely well and in accordance with the school's aim for pupils to develop a sound moral framework and an appreciation of the spiritual dimension to life.
- 4.2 Pupils have a high degree of spiritual awareness. Their self-esteem and confidence are demonstrated through their appreciation of the outstanding artistic and creative displays of their work. Awe and wonder was evident in the detail of the miniature flowers painstakingly painted by pupils in a Year 5 art lesson. Assemblies provide opportunities for collective worship, as staff and pupils come together to reinforce spiritual discernment. Pupils develop an appreciation and understanding of the major religions through the religious education (RE) curriculum.
- 4.3 The pupils' moral development is excellent. They articulate their ideas clearly and with conviction, as demonstrated in a Year 6 PSHE lesson about negative peer pressure. They have a well-developed sense of right and wrong, and of justice and fairness. Targets for good behaviour are posted in each classroom and within the 'Pupil Planner' books. Pupils show commitment to helping others less fortunate than themselves locally and globally.
- 4.4 Pupils demonstrate outstanding social awareness as they care for each other. In one lesson, without prompting, a pupil took an extra worksheet and stuck it in her friend's exercise book when she had gone to a music lesson. Pupils show co-operation, tolerance and respect. A relaxed, yet respectful relationship between pupils and staff allows them to share a common love of learning and doing their best. In the questionnaire, some pupils mentioned their perception of inequality in the treatment by staff of boys and girls. Inspection findings showed that some of these observations to be correct, but the school was already aware of minor issues that have arisen during the recent change to co-education and any necessary action is being taken. Pupils feel trusted by the staff.
- 4.5 Pupils have a mature sense of their cultural identity, and they understand and respect the cultures of others. Excellent multi-faith work in RE enables them to contrast and compare different faiths, adding to cultural awareness. In geography lessons, pupils learn about the way of life in different countries, for example in the Year 4 work seen on St Lucia. During an assembly about the general election, the pupils' cultural knowledge was extended through a consideration of the role of institutions and democracy. They were able to explain the meaning and intention of propaganda.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.6 Excellent support and guidance is provided for the pupils, in keeping with the aim of the school to enable pupils to understand their responsibilities to others. The arrangements for welfare, health and safety enable everyone to feel safe and well cared for in a secure, friendly, supportive environment. Staff act as ideal role models, by their positive relationships with each other as well as by their teamwork, and this clearly influences the pupils. Visitors to the school are treated with care and consideration.
- 4.7 The school has effective procedures for promoting good behaviour. Well-planned PSHE lessons and form periods address social issues, for example in a Year 3 form period when pupils considered the value of positive relationships. Classrooms all have 'no bullying' signs, notices about cyber bullying and the telephone number for ChildLine. Pupils say that bullying is rare, and receives prompt and effective action by staff if it does occur.
- 4.8 Unacceptable behaviour is most unusual, but is dealt with quickly and appropriately. A good balance exists of reward through house points, and punishment such as minus points or detentions. Pupils enjoy working to achieve the 'Platinum Certificate' for 200 house points. A newly-introduced computerised system for staff to share and track pastoral matters and parental concerns is already being put to good use.
- 4.9 The detailed policies and procedures on safeguarding are comprehensive and understood by staff. Training in this area is thorough and up to date. A member of the senior leadership team oversees pastoral care, and this is highly appreciated by parents. The admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and immediate checks are made if there is any doubt about a pupil's absence.
- 4.10 All necessary health and safety checks are in place regarding fire and other hazards. Staff are vigilant at the end of the school day in ensuring that pupils leave safely. Provision for pupils who are ill is very good. Lunch is a pleasant social occasion with exceptionally good food and a wide choice of healthy options. Healthy living is promoted through physical activity, with regular games and physical education (PE) lessons and extra-curricular sporting opportunities. All required risk assessments are in place, as is the required Special Educational Needs and Disability Act accessibility plan.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The governors' oversight of the school is excellent, with total commitment and support contributing to the successful implementation of the school's aims. Committees are highly effective as they monitor educational standards, oversee the school's finances, and invest in high-calibre staff, accommodation and resources. Recently a major new teaching block has been provided, with spacious and airy rooms fitted with the best of traditional and technological resources. A committee responsible for the work of the prep school and pre-prep meets regularly, is chaired by the former head of a prep school, and oversees very efficiently the interests of these parts of the school community.
- 5.2 Some individual governors are well known to staff, and by frequent attendance at school events have a good insight into the working of the school, helping them to provide support and stimulus for growth and improvement. They have a clear vision for the strategic development of the school. A comprehensive handbook for governors and their own dedicated website enable all governors to play a full part in the governance of the school.
- 5.3 The governors attach great importance to their statutory responsibilities for child protection, welfare, health and safety. At the time of the initial inspection visit, an issue became apparent with regard to the appointment process of staff recruited from overseas. This had caused a technical failure to meet all regulatory requirements, although at no time was the safety of pupils compromised in any way. The matter was treated with the utmost seriousness and remedied with great haste, typifying the manner in which the governors discharge their responsibilities.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.4 The quality of leadership and management is excellent at all levels of responsibility, in accordance with the aim of the school to provide a stimulating, rewarding and supportive working environment. Clear educational direction is provided, as reflected in the quality of the pupils' education and achievements, and in the high standard of personal development. Senior management is strong and effective across the whole range of school activity.
- 5.5 Those with management responsibilities are very effective and perceptive in their self evaluation, setting priorities and ensuring that they are achieved. Clarity of vision benefits the whole community. The school has seen significant change since the previous inspection, as it has become co-educational and pupil numbers have increased considerably. Strategies have been developed to assist in the integration of girls, and exceptional new facilities have been built.
- 5.6 Senior management is committed to recruiting, supporting, developing and motivating staff. Very high quality staff are appointed, and staffing levels are excellent, enabling strong support to be given to pupils. Teaching and support staff are deployed well and make an excellent contribution to pupils' learning and welfare. Links between the Perse Pelican pre-prep and the Perse Prep School are strengthened by weekly visits from prep school staff to the Pelican to co-ordinate and support the transition.

- 5.7 Great attention is given to staff training in safeguarding, welfare, health and safety to ensure that all are suitably trained. Safeguarding is given a particularly high priority, and checks on staff are recorded suitably on the central register. A strength of leadership and management was demonstrated when it was brought to the school's attention at the initial inspection visit that there had been a technical irregularity in staff checks relating to staff recruiting from overseas. The senior management team immediately responded by putting systems in place to ensure the well-being of pupils.
- 5.8 Careful attention has been paid to the recommendation of the previous inspection report to monitor teaching more closely. The quality of the monitoring has been improved, resulting in an effective, robust and rigorous system of appraisal, in which peer observation takes place and focused objectives are set. As a result of the recommendation to include a head of pastoral care as an additional member of the senior management team, the appointment was made and this has contributed to the high quality of pastoral care in the school.

5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.9 The school maintains an excellent, constructive relationship with parents, who are strongly supportive, as shown in the pre-inspection questionnaire. Most comments were very positive, especially about the range of subjects offered and the way the school promotes worthwhile attitudes and views, all of which was fully in accordance with the inspection findings. Very few negative comments were made. Responses showed that on the whole the school has handled well any parental concerns. No formal complaints have been made in the previous year.
- 5.10 Parents and prospective parents are kept well informed. The school website is most comprehensive. It includes a short video of the school in action, curricular information, an excellent weekly newsletter including information on past and future events, first-rate photographs of recent events and library news.
- 5.11 Parents have ample opportunities for involvement in the work and progress of their children. Informal and formal parents evenings are held for each year group, and parents can speak briefly with form teachers at the beginning or end of the school day or contact them by email. Reports are detailed and helpful.
- 5.12 The parents association, Perse Prep Parents (PPP), is very active. Many events take place, and money is raised, for example for the 2010 Centenary fund. Many parents come into school to help, and several recently shared their expertise during a science week, giving talks about such subjects as DNA, aviation and engines.
- 5.13 The administration staff are extremely helpful and caring to parents, pupils and visitors. Senior staff are readily available to parents with an 'open door' policy, and the head is usually available in the playground at end of the school day for anybody who wishes to speak to him.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of the pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr David Bunkell	Reporting Inspector
Mr Andrew Carter	Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Jane Merriman	Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Janet Watts	Team Inspector (Director of Studies IAPS school)