



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

LEWESTON SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Leweston School

Full Name of School	Leweston School			
DCSF Number	835/6025			
Registered Charity Number	295175			
Address	Leweston School Leweston Sherborne Dorset DT9 6EN			
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Head	Mr A Aylward			
Chair of Governors	Mr Andrew May			
Age Range	11 to 19			
Total Number of Pupils	228			
Gender of Pupils	Girls			
Numbers by Age	11-16:	181	16-19:	47
Number of Day Pupils	132		Capacity for flexi-boarding:	20
Number of Boarders	Total:	96		
	Full:	70	Weekly:	26
Inspection date	23 Feb 2010 to 24 Feb 2010			
Final (team) visit	22 Mar 2010 to 24 Mar 2010			

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The previous ISI inspection was in February 2006.

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 of boarding was not carried out in conjunction with the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted for Social Care Inspection report refers to an inspection in February 2006 and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

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. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Leweston School was founded in the town centre of Sherborne in 1891 by the Congregation of the Religious of Christian Instruction, and opened as a school for boys and girls up to the age of 11. In 1947 the senior girls were moved to Leweston Manor, three miles out of town. The school bought the freehold in 2001 and is now a charitable trust running a day and boarding school for 238 girls aged from 11 to 18. Since the previous inspection a new staff resource centre and a new library have been created. The current head has been in post since 2006.
- 1.2 The school's mission, "to work with pupils and their parents to provide a contemporary education rooted in the Catholic tradition", develops the school motto "Gaudere et Bene Facere". Other statements express the aims "to instil a love of learning and inspire the life of the mind", and develop "courtesy, affection, a strong sense of community, self-respect, respect for others and their gifts, and respect for the academic enterprise".
- 1.3 The average ability of girls on entry to the school is above the national average, though the range is wide. Very few girls leave after taking GCSE examinations in Year 11, and the great majority of sixth-form leavers move on to higher education courses of their choice. Around one-third of full boarders come from overseas, whilst day girls mainly come from Sherborne and the surrounding towns and villages in north Dorset. Fourteen boarders receive Ministry of Defence or Foreign and Commonwealth Office boarding allowances. Thirty-two girls have English as an additional language (EAL) and 29 of them receive specialist support. Forty-eight pupils are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and 33 receive learning support. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs.
- 1.4 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 The school is doing well by its pupils and fulfilling its aim to provide pupils with a contemporary education that is rooted in the Catholic tradition. Pupils make good progress and attain good standards in relation to their abilities. They achieve results well above the national average for all schools at GCSE and A level. Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. They excel in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities, reaching high standards in music, drama and sport. The overall quality of teaching is good, and contributes effectively to pupils' progress, achievements and personal development, though information and communication technology (ICT) is underused in lessons. Assessment that provides information on the pupils' progress is good, but the quality of marking is inconsistent.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is outstanding, fostered by the strong community ethos that pervades all that the school does. Their excellent spiritual and moral development is clearly expressed in their relationships with one another and the staff and their growing self-awareness. Pupils are prepared to take on responsibility and serve on committees, which helps them to understand something of working within a social and political context. They have a good understanding of cultural differences.
- 2.3 The excellent governors and senior management have worked hard and successfully to develop a positive ethos. They have a clear vision for the school. They recognise that work still has to be done to fully embed some of the initiatives taken, such as the observation of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work, and to ensure that teachers have all the resources they need. Senior management has been persistent in its efforts to respond to the recommendations of the previous inspection. It has improved assessment and the availability of standardised data and is generally meeting the needs of able pupils as well as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language. Some good examples of independent learning and of pupils using computers skilfully were observed by inspectors. The school has still to ensure more consistency in marking practices. Parents' replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire were very supportive of the school. Inspectors are in agreement with their belief that the school makes available plenty of information, promotes worthwhile attitudes and views, and provides excellent pastoral care.

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 met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003, as subsequently amended.

(ii) Recommended action

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Build on the good work already begun in monitoring by providing training in the evaluation of lessons and the scrutiny of the pupils' work to ensure that the quality of provision is improved.
 2. Improve the overall quality of marking by ensuring that the best practice is shared to the benefit of the pupils, and that the marking policy is followed consistently by every department.
 3. Develop further the teaching resources, including the use and availability of ICT.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

- 3.1 Pupils make good progress and reach good standards in relation to their abilities. In lessons and written work, they show thorough understanding. This is in line with the judgement of the school's previous report and the school's own evaluation. It also fulfils the school's aim to 'inspire the life of the mind'. Results at GCSE and A level are well above the average for all maintained schools.
- 3.2 Pupils are articulate and good listeners. They contribute well to lessons, which benefits their learning. They produce some good extended writing. They handle number problems and mathematical concepts well. They have a good facility with ICT, as observed in a lesson where several pupils made computer presentations, though opportunities were missed in other lessons to enable pupils to make good use of computers. In the best lessons observed, they demonstrate good command of subject-specific vocabulary, can draw on previous learning effectively and so make good progress. They show excellent skill in interpreting information from text. These judgements were supported by the confidence that pupils showed in the work-based interviews. Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to their work, and work independently to good effect, as seen in art and music; they present their work in an organised fashion, as seen in their exercise books. They enjoy their studies and demonstrate outstanding commitment. They are keen to succeed, and persevere in what they are doing. They work well in groups and willingly support one another's learning.
- 3.3 Pupils achieve excellent results in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Their performances in instrumental and singing activities are exceptional for a school of this size, with some very good results in various examinations and competitions. For example, outstanding results were gained recently in singing in the Bath Festival. Pupils have also performed outstandingly well in team games with success in hockey, netball, athletics, football and cross-country. Their success in academic work, sport and music owes much to the commitment of their teachers and their own positive attitudes. Their behaviour is exemplary and they enjoy extremely good relationships among themselves and with their teachers and other staff.

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

- 3.4 The school provides a fruitful educational experience through its broad and balanced curriculum and its excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Provision has improved since the previous inspection and is consistent with the school's motto, 'to rejoice and to do well'. The curriculum prepares pupils well for their next stage in life.
- 3.5 The curriculum is suitable for all ages, abilities and needs, and covers the required areas of learning. It includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum and in Years 7 to 11 adds personal, social and health education (PSHE), which covers a range of topics including education about drug and alcohol abuse, sex education and civil institutions. Religious studies (RE), drama, classics, and three modern foreign languages also contribute to the pupils' learning. Consequently, pupils have opportunities to develop a wide range of skills, which include the linguistic, numerical, creative, aesthetic, physical and social. In Years 10 and 11, pupils follow

an appropriate core of subjects and then a range of options, which are arranged with sufficient flexibility to enable them to study the subjects of their choice. In the sixth form pupils study the Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives Course which includes key skills, creative thinking and general studies; they also choose from a surprisingly wide range of options for their examination subjects. Excellent careers provision is a feature of the curriculum throughout. Pupils have access to a good range of advice, and older pupils can use various assessments to help them in their choice of a career.

- 3.6 Very good provision is made for those with LDD or who have EAL; the former are helped by their well constructed individual education plans. Both groups can benefit from the expert personal tuition available to them if their parents wish. A number of teachers make good provision and so help pupils of all abilities to make good progress.
- 3.7 The curriculum is enriched by an excellent programme of extra-curricular activities, links with the community, voluntary service and work experience. They offer a superb springboard for a range of interests in later life. Music, drama and sport are important elements but clubs, societies and subject clinics such as the knitting club, debating society, and a Latin clinic are also available. The science department has links with Bristol University which have led to science days in school. There are trips to Italy and Spain, the choir tours Germany, and history and politics study tours have been to the USA. As the inspectors left the school, five Year 12 girls were preparing to go to a sister school, Jana Jyoti, in Nepal to teach and take educational equipment for which they have raised money. Community service takes place in a nearby village and language assistance is given in a local primary school. Outside speakers are also used to widen pupils' understanding, as in the NATO debate in the Global Perspective course in Year 12 facilitated by a visitor.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.8 The overall quality of teaching is good; some is excellent and occasionally it is less than good. This is as reported in the previous report and as it is judged by the school. The procedures for assessment are good.
- 3.9 Teaching is mostly knowledgeable and lively, important factors in the good standards that pupils reach, and the progress that pupils of all abilities make. Planning is good and in the main, teaching uses suitable and effective methods to keep learning progressing, as observed in a Year 8 chemistry class. The best teaching responds well to the pupils' different needs, and makes good use of the information provided by the special needs department.
- 3.10 Teachers make good use of a satisfactory range of resources, though ICT is often under-used. They manage the pupils' behaviour effectively and the pupils respond to their teachers' high expectations. Consequently, pupils behave well, have a positive attitude to study and demonstrate impressive enthusiasm. They take responsibility for their own work, as seen in a Year 11 textiles lesson, work effectively in groups and pairs, as in a Year 7 drama lesson and were often observed contributing to lessons through their willingness to answer questions. They respond well to challenge. Teachers create a positive working atmosphere within their lessons.

- 3.11 The school has good assessment procedures. The standardised tests help in the identification of those who need extra challenge and those who have LDD. In a few instances teachers were observed providing work aimed at those with particular strengths or weaknesses, as in Year 10 geography lesson, and in other instances those with EAL or LDD received extra support from the special needs department. The quality of teachers' marking is variable, and comments designed to help pupils improve their work are not a consistent feature. Some very good examples of marking were seen in English, art and politics, where helpful targets were set. However, in other instances, marking was no more than a tick and the criteria for marking issued to pupils were not used consistently. As a result, pupils do not always know how to make better progress.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 Pupils develop excellent qualities in relation to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural life. This is a similar judgement to that at the time of the previous report and the school's own evaluation. Pupils respond well to what the school provides, fulfilling its aims 'to develop courtesy, affection, a strong sense of community, self respect, and respect for others and their gifts'. It also contributes strongly to the school's desire to provide a contemporary education rooted in the Catholic tradition.
- 4.2 Pupils respond very well to the opportunities for prayer and reflection. They understand the significance of a belief and that not everything can be explained in factual terms. They have a sense of mystery and of the importance of creation. A Year 9 class amply demonstrated this when explaining what they were trying to achieve with their new cardboard creations to be worn at the school's next model showing. Pupils are confident young adults; self-esteem and self-worth appear as natural outcomes of the community ethos within which they live. They have no hesitation in celebrating the achievements of their peers. Pupils have a clear understanding of the concepts of goodness and truth.
- 4.3 Pupils have a very strong moral commitment, recognising what is the right thing to do in relationships with their peers and their teachers. They have a strong sense of right and wrong. Pupils recognise the importance of rules and in the main abide by them, recognising the importance of good relationships between adults and other pupils. Pupils contribute to the strong sense of moral community that exists in the school and the importance of this in realising the common good. They willingly see as beneficial the moral duty of helping others. In school this extends to older pupils providing support for younger pupils, and to all pupils being willing to contribute well to various charities, local and distant.
- 4.4 Pupils develop outstandingly well socially. They willingly take on responsibility, whether it be helping with the liturgies in the chapel, or as captains of teams. They show initiative and confidently deal with others, as demonstrated when showing inspectors around the school. The school council, the boarding committee and the boarders' food committee provide them with the opportunity to develop social skills as well as learn the ways of democracy. They can point to a variety of successes their discussions have brought. Through PSHE and subjects such as history pupils gain an understanding of civil institutions and the political scene. For example, Year 9 pupils had no difficulty in distinguishing the current political parties and the personalities involved in them. Their relationships with teachers and other children have a positive effect on their learning and their personal development.
- 4.5 Cultural development is a strength of the school. The pupils understand British culture through its literature, its music and its art. In a range of subjects, including geography, history, languages and art, they learn about different cultures and how they may have changed in response to a changing context. They learn about other faiths, such as Judaism and Islam in RE, and benefit greatly from mixing with children from a number of different countries East and West. On occasions, opportunities are offered to pupils to explain their background and talk of their culture as in the case of a Japanese pupil. Through visits abroad pupils further extend their understanding of what others do and think.

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

- 4.6 The school provides an excellent standard of pastoral care for its pupils. It has maintained the quality that was present at the time of the previous report and is in line with the school's own evaluation. It fulfils the school's intention to provide a secure, happy and fruitful community for its pupils.
- 4.7 The structure of care is effective. It includes the deputy head pastoral, the director of boarding, heads of year, and form tutors; they meet regularly to discuss issues related to their responsibilities. The chaplain is also available and consulted willingly by pupils and staff. As a result, the school has a strong sense of community in which relationships are very positive. Tolerance and compassion are evident and racial prejudice non-existent. Pupils say they feel safe and know who to go to if they have a problem.
- 4.8 In the pupils' questionnaire and in formal and informal talks with inspectors, pupils remarked positively about their school, liked to be there and would recommend it to others. Their general demeanour around the school is impressive for its calmness and maturity.
- 4.9 The school has an appropriate policy on rewards and punishments. Sanctions, serious or not, are rarely needed, but when used are given according to an escalating scale.
- 4.10 The anti-bullying policy meets requirements, and includes appropriate reference to the behaviour policy and to boarding. The safeguarding policy is thorough and training for all staff is regular and appropriate. The safe recruitment of staff is carefully done and recorded and includes appropriate checks on all governors and volunteers. Fire precautions are effective and fire practices are held each term; boarders experience night time evacuations. Electrical testing is carried out regularly.
- 4.11 The bursar chairs the health and safety committee, which has a governor member who reports to the full governing body. The school has an appropriate policy for enabling those with learning or physical disabilities to enter the school and to benefit from what is offered. Pupils benefit from a healthy diet; choice is varied at breakfast and lunch and acceptable for boarders' supper. The medical centre provides a safe haven for those not feeling well. In the evening the house staff take over the responsibilities from the nurse; they are appropriately trained in first aid and able to dispense a small range of non-prescription medicines. All medical supplies are in a locked cupboard and records of use are kept. Any overnight treatment is shared with the medical centre the following morning so that the full picture can be seen and trends detected. The school doctor visits twice a week. The attendance registers are well kept and any apparent absences followed up with parents quickly. Registers are suitably stored for three years.

4.(c) The quality of boarding education

- 4.12 Boarding provides a good social experience for pupils who are full, weekly or flexi boarders and contributes effectively to their personal development. Relationships are friendly among the boarders and the boarders give this as a reason as to why they enjoy boarding. Boarders from different parts of the world mix together easily, an experience enjoyed by one of the inspectors when at breakfast he was joined by pupils from Saudi Arabia, Spain, Tenerife and the Far East as well as pupils from the United Kingdom.
- 4.13 The boarders appreciate the helpful support they get from house staff and the willingness they show in helping them if they have concerns. They have on hand a school nurse during the day and a well fitted medical centre. A doctor visits during the week. Boarders report that the boarding atmosphere is homely and supportive; younger boarders tend to share rooms with those chosen by housemistresses, but soon become friends. The staff have endeavoured to ensure a good mix of pupils from the different nationalities by having rules about when those from overseas can talk together in their mother tongue. This works well and helps the integration of pupils. It is especially helpful for those pupils who come just for one year, mainly to sample a part of English culture and learn the language. Boarders have the opportunity to express their views through the boarding committee and the food council about matters to do with boarding.
- 4.14 A wide range of activities is available to boarders out of school and at weekends. During the evenings, the facilities of the school are available and there is also a wide range of extra-curricular activities which are offered every evening before prep and supper. Morning lectures on topics of general interest and sporting activities can take up most of Saturday, and on Sundays boarders attend Mass. In addition, visits to the local town are organised on Saturday afternoons or to other locations of cultural or recreational interest, such as the City of Bath or the Jurassic Coast. Pupils also enjoy going to the cinema on occasions.
- 4.15 The accommodation is of a generally good quality, particularly the junior house. The houses are clean and in the communal areas generally tidy. Pupils can make drinks and older pupils have access to a microwave. On certain evenings every week evening prayers are said in the chapel for each of the houses. Overall, boarding is enjoyed by the pupils and contributes effectively to the school's mission and aims.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The governing body is highly committed to the school's mission and its efforts to achieve it. It provides excellent support and guidance for the school. The governors contribute positively to the school's aim to create a strong sense of community and to provide a contemporary education rooted in the Catholic tradition. This is a more positive judgement than that at the time of the previous report and the school's own evaluation. The governing body consists of people with different expertise. The three committees, finance and general purposes, development and education provide a good platform for dealing with the various issues facing the school and provide a forum in which the governors' different expertise can be used effectively on behalf of the school.
- 5.2 Governors have a good awareness of their responsibilities. They are keen to provide effective support, meet with members of the senior management team when appropriate and keep abreast of educational developments. They are keen to be seen by staff in and around school and to give staff the opportunity to talk with them about their current situation. This explains the visits of members of the education committee to the school to observe practice in lessons, and the invitations to heads of department to attend education committee meetings to talk about their departments. The governors also have in place appropriate personnel with responsibilities for child protection and the health and safety of those in the school. Several governors have benefited from appropriate training.
- 5.3 The governing body has ensured that the school has ample good quality staff and a satisfactory range of resources. They are keen to improve accommodation. Governors attend school functions and the more senior members are on hand to attend school if their advice or help is required.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.4 The quality of leadership and management has improved since the previous inspection and is now excellent. The senior management team is effective in creating a strong Catholic ethos which fulfils a key aim of the school. Through providing an appropriate curriculum, an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, good quality teaching and excellent pastoral care, it is succeeding in raising standards and nurturing strong personal values. The changes in senior personnel, procedures and approach since the previous inspection have led to considerable improvements, among which is more effective and transparent communication.
- 5.5 Leadership at all levels has been characterised by a clear vision and significantly raised expectations among staff and pupils. These are reflected in the remarkably strong community ethic that pervades the school. The process of management has led to short-term school development planning that is clearly defined, with appropriate measurable objectives identified as a result of consultation among staff, parents and governors. The commitment to the programme of development is evident, but currently it is not supported by a long-term strategic plan that spells out what and how changes will be delivered over the next three to five years.

- 5.6 Formal systems for supporting, monitoring and evaluating educational provision have been established, as well as bi-annual appraisal of all staff. Lesson observation and book scrutiny by senior management and by departments is now common, though the sort of rigour and perceptiveness required to ensure continuous improvement is not consistent across all departments. Professional development is supported through in-school provision as well as enabling staff to learn from external courses. Care is taken to appoint well-qualified staff who will add to the school's overall effectiveness, and appropriate induction is provided. The school participates in the national scheme for newly qualified teachers.
- 5.7 The school has rigorous systems in place for checking all those staff, governors and volunteers who will be working with the children through its recruitment procedures. This includes the particular requirements for staff working in a boarding school. The central register of appointments is in order and there are sound recording procedures. Staff receive appropriate training for their roles in child protection, welfare, and health and safety matters.

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

- 5.8 The school has worked hard at developing excellent relationships with parents. This is stronger than at the time of the previous inspection and has drawn parents into recognising the strength of the community spirit.
- 5.9 The new website is clear and informative. It contains all the officially required information. The school supplies a comprehensive family handbook, a termly calendar plus fortnightly Leweston Briefings, as well as termly letters from the head. It has a well-presented magazine, Excelsior. The increasing use of e-mail provides parents with ready communication. Parents receive written reports which give specific information on the pupils' attitudes and their progress in subjects. Parents are invited to comment on these reports. In addition, half-termly grades are provided for all pupils and parent-staff consultation meetings are held at least once per year for each year group.
- 5.10 Parents are active in contributing to school life, whether sitting on a governors' committee, involved in the chaplaincy team, contributing to the careers programme, fund-raising or helping out with book week. The Leweston Society has played a major role in the recent, highly successful fund-raising initiative for renovating the school buildings.
- 5.11 The school has an appropriate complaints policy, but parental concerns are usually dealt with informally. None has reached the formal complaints stage in recent years. All complaints are properly logged. The annual parental survey helps the school keep abreast of parental views. The head often greets parents as they drop off and pick up their daughters so he can listen to their comments and concerns.
- 5.12 In the pre-inspection questionnaires, the great majority of parents indicated that they are very pleased with the school and, notably, few concerns were expressed. Parents were particularly positive about the "information provided about the school", its promoting of "worthwhile attitudes and views" and its pastoral care. A very few parents expressed concerns about some of the teaching. Inspectors agree fully with the positive views expressed by parents and although they found a small amount of less than good teaching they recognise that the school has in place systems designed to continuously improve the quality of teaching.

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 pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors, a governors' representative, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and 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

Terence Dillon

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Del Cooke

Stephen Pugh

Reporting Inspector

Head of department, GSA school

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Deputy Head, HMC school