

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

FIRWOOD MANOR PREPARATORY SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Firwood Manor Preparatory School

Full Name of School Firwood Manor Preparatory School

DfE Number 353/6017

Address Firwood Manor Preparatory School

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Telephone Number 01616 206570 Fax Number 01616 263550

Email Address admin@fms.gemsedu.co.uk

Headteacher Mr Darren Robinson

Chair of Governors Professor Patricia Preedy

Proprietor Global Education Management Systems UK Limited

Age Range 2 to 11

Total Number of Pupils 107

Gender of Pupils Mixed (66 boys; 41 girls)

Numbers by Age 0-2 (EYFS): **3** 5-11: **77**

3-5 (EYFS): **27** 11-18: **0**

Number of Day Pupils **Total:** 107

Head of EYFS Setting

Mrs Caroline Greenwood

EYFS Gender

Mixed (15 boys; 15 girls)

Inspection dates

20 Sep 2011 to 21 Sep 2011

17 Oct 2011 to 19 Oct 2011

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 October 2005.

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 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, 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.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

^{*}These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Firwood Manor Preparatory School is a co-educational day school located in a residential area on the outskirts of Oldham. Founded in 2002 as a proprietary school, and purchased in 2004 by Global Education Management Systems (GEMS) the school educates 107 pupils aged between two and eleven years. Thirty children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).
- 1.2 The school aims to promote a love of learning, to develop the full potential of each child, and to engender positive values and good manners within a supportive and caring environment, where they feel valued, fulfilled and confident. The GEMS UK governance board fulfil the governance function. The present headmaster was appointed in September 2011.
- 1.3 Pupils are admitted without academic selection. Pupils are not entered for national tests. Standardised tests indicate that the ability profile of the school is in line with the national average with pupils demonstrating a wide range of abilities. Pupils are drawn mainly from families in the local business community, and move on to selective independent or maintained secondary schools in the area. The school has identified seventeen pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), seven of whom receive specialist support from the school. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs, and three pupils have English as an additional language (EAL).
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 Firwood Manor Preparatory School is successful in achieving its aims. From the EYFS onwards, pupils are well educated and achieve good standards. They make good progress in relation to their wide-ranging abilities because of effective teaching, and a good programme of activities both in and outside school. The academic curriculum is good overall. However, information and communication technology (ICT) is not fully embedded across the curriculum, and the ICT suite and library are underused as resources to promote pupils' research and independent learning skills. Extra-curricular provision and enrichment opportunities are good. Pupils with SEND make good progress because of the effective support they receive. More able pupils generally make good progress, particularly in response to tasks with levels of challenge appropriate to their potential. Excellent attitudes to their work contribute strongly to pupils' academic achievement, as does their often exemplary behaviour and their very good relationships with each other and their teachers.
- 2.2 Pupils' personal development is outstanding and the arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff are excellent. The school is highly successful in achieving its aims in this respect. In the pre-inspection questionnaire and during interviews pupils were most positive about their school, commenting often on the kindness and helpfulness of staff.
- 2.3 Governance, leadership and management are all good, fully supporting the school's aims and meeting the responsibilities for the welfare, health and safety of pupils effectively. The collaboration and teamwork of senior managers and staff is of a high quality. Curriculum needs are identified well through good self-evaluation by subject co-ordinators, but the school lacks oversight of the curriculum as a whole. The school has responded well to the recommendations of the previous inspection. In the pre-inspection questionnaire most parents were extremely positive about all aspects of school life. A small minority of parents indicated that they are not content with the amount of work their children have to do at home, and a small number are not satisfied with the governance of the school. No evidence to support these views was found during the inspection.

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 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
 - Increase the use of ICT across all areas of the curriculum so that the library and ICT suite become well-used resources that further develop pupils' independent research skills.
 - 2. Continue to develop the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school to include oversight of the curriculum as a whole.
 - 3. Develop a long-term strategic development plan for the EYFS that identifies and prioritises areas for improvement.
 - 4. Extend the planning of lessons in the EYFS to include more evaluation and planning for children's next steps in learning, especially for the more able.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

- 3.1 The overall quality of the pupils' achievements is good. It fulfils the school's aim to nurture a love of learning and to develop a focused approach to work, enabling pupils to realise their potential.
- 3.2 Pupils of all ages show great pride in their school, and express themselves willingly and eloquently. They demonstrate good standards in literacy, numeracy and science. They are creative, and artwork of a high standard is displayed in classrooms and in key areas around the school. Since the previous inspection, the school has successfully increased the rigour of written work for older pupils, and set higher standards in the quality of presentation and handwriting. Younger pupils punctuate work correctly and older pupils write fluently and creatively. Pupils have good mathematical knowledge and skills and apply these well to problem-solving. They display good levels of understanding of scientific concepts and are keen to develop strong investigative skills, as evidenced in a science lesson involving the dissection of a pig's heart. Pupils display appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Preparation for entrance examinations into senior schools is thorough and most pupils gain a place at the school of their choice.
- Pupils achieve good levels of success across a range of subjects and activities and these successes have a strong impact on their personal development. Achievements of all kinds, both at home and within school, are strongly encouraged and celebrated. Pupils achieve high standards in elocution and drama examinations and older pupils are most successful in gaining Spanish language certificates. Fit and active pupils achieve well in team and individual sports, gaining a high level of success in fixtures against other schools. Team and individual successes are also seen in swimming, cross-country running, football and netball.
- 3.4 Pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance against national tests but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be good in relation to national, age-related expectations. Pupils make a good start in the EYFS and all make at least good progress. This good progress is maintained as pupils move through the school, as evidenced by work seen in their books and during lessons. Results from standardised tests indicate that most pupils make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress in relation to age and capabilities.
- 3.5 Pupils with SEND and those who find some aspects of their learning more difficult make good progress because of the good levels of support they receive from staff, as seen in the scrutiny of samples of their work and from assessment data. More able pupils and those with particular talents generally achieve well. They make particularly good progress in response to tasks with levels of challenge appropriate to their potential. However, this is not consistent across all year groups and subjects.
- 3.6 Pupils display an excellent attitude to their studies, which has a strong impact on their achievement. They enjoy their lessons, are highly motivated, work well together, and concentrate well, persevering at a task when it offers them the right level of challenge.

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

- 3.7 Curricular provision is good overall and is in line with the school's aims. The curriculum is considerably enhanced by a wide variety of extra-curricular activities and enriched by a wealth of visits and visitors. It is suited to all ages and includes a good quality personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. The development of literacy and numeracy is at its core and it is enhanced by specialist teaching in swimming, games, music, the performing arts and Spanish.
- 3.8 Since the previous inspection, good progress has been made in curriculum development, meeting the recommendations of that report. This has been achieved by adapting the time and length of lessons to reflect the ages and needs of pupils. Teaching and learning have been strengthened further by the appointment of coordinators for all subjects, and by a review of curricular documentation.
- 3.9 From an early age pupils benefit from discrete ICT lessons. However, the ICT suite and library are not fully utilised as resources to promote pupils' research and independent learning skills.
- 3.10 The provision for pupils with SEND is good and in line with the school's aim to help all pupils to develop their potential and to recognise that they have a worthwhile contribution to make to school life. Detailed individual education plans are provided. These are shared with pupils, parents and staff and reviewed each half term. More able, gifted and talented pupils are identified and provided with enrichment opportunities. The school recognises the need to continue to develop provision for these pupils.
- 3.11 The range of extra-curricular activities available is good for the size of the school and plays a useful role in the pupils' personal and social development. Activities cover a wide range, including sport, school subjects and activities of general interest. Clubs are well organised and enjoyed by pupils.
- 3.12 Links with the community are an important part of the school's holistic approach to learning. Visitors to the school and visits outside are well integrated into the curriculum. Pupils enjoy visiting museums, galleries, theatres and sites of historical interest. They take part in local community initiatives and projects including singing in the community and the collection and distribution of harvest gifts.
- 3.13 Older pupils attend residential visits at home and abroad providing valuable opportunities to develop independence and extend links with the local and wider community. Pupils' horizons are further extended, and their understanding of the needs of others enhanced, by their collections to support a number of local, national and international charities.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.14 The quality of teaching is good and makes a significant contribution to the achievement of pupils, in line with the school's aims. Teaching at its best is characterised by clear objectives and high expectations for all pupils. It moves at a brisk pace and encourages pupils to think for themselves and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills well. Occasionally, activities do not sufficiently match the needs of all pupils and in these lessons progress, though adequate, is less rapid.
- 3.15 Praise and encouragement are well used and add considerably to pupils' enjoyment of their lessons. Pupils commented on how helpful teachers were in ensuring their understanding in lessons. Classroom behaviour is mostly good, with pupils always willing to add to class learning when invited to discuss or to offer their own views and ideas, as exemplified by older pupils presenting their research findings during a history lesson. Good quality resources, including interactive whiteboards, are incorporated well to support pupils' learning, although the library and ICT suite are underused as resources for independent research and cross-curricular use.
- 2.6 Assessment procedures are good overall. All work is marked regularly and encouraging comments are common. The most effective marking helps pupils to understand what they need to do to improve their work, but this is not done consistently. Standardised tests are used to measure pupils' progress. Analysis of this data to inform teachers' planning and to help track pupils' progress is at an early stage of development. Teachers use a variety of informal methods to check the pupils' knowledge and understanding within the classroom, including written and oral tests, quizzes and end of topic mini-assessments. In the pre-inspection questionnaires a small minority of parents indicated that they were not content with the amount of homework their children receive. Inspection findings do not concur with these views and consider that the amount of homework set is appropriate for the ages and capabilities of the pupils.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The personal development of pupils, including those in the EYFS is excellent and supports fully the school's aim to develop pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence whilst encouraging them to be independent, responsible and compassionate.
- 4.2 Pupils develop a strong sense of personal identity and self-esteem from an early age, because of the encouraging and supportive attitudes of staff, who know their pupils very well and create an ethos of encouragement and celebration of individual achievement. Through assemblies and subjects such as art, music and religious education, pupils learn to appreciate spiritual values of beauty, truth, empathy and compassion. In assembly, older pupils responded reflectively and compassionately to the treatment of suffragettes, and their writing on the lives of soldiers during the Great War demonstrates mature understanding and high levels of empathy.
- 4.3 From an early age, pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of what is right and wrong and recognise the importance of rules and responsible behaviour. The respect and affection that staff display towards pupils, combined with a gentle but firm insistence on high standards of behaviour, help to instil in pupils clear and highly appropriate moral values to guide their behaviour. A high proportion of parents consider that the school successfully encourages an excellent standard of behaviour and gives their children worthwhile attitudes and views.
- 4.4 Pupils of all ages exhibit high levels of social awareness. They have an excellent ethic of charity work for the less privileged and a wide range of national and international charities are generously supported. The qualities of leadership and teamwork are well developed through activities which allow pupils to work as teams and take responsibility, for instance as members of the school council. This provides an exercise in democracy and committee work; in addition, it demonstrates to pupils that debate and corporate decision-making can produce results, as exemplified by the changes to the school lunch menu and the charity chosen by pupils for fundraising activities. Older pupils look after younger pupils well, and responsibilities ranging from house captains to playground 'Squaddies' or taking the register to the office are undertaken highly conscientiously.
- 4.5 Pupils develop well culturally by acquiring a respect for and an appreciation of their own and other cultures. Pupils are encouraged to be understanding and tolerant through assemblies, lessons and extra-curricular activities. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to learn about other cultures through art, music and literature. Visits abroad and support for overseas charities increase pupils' awareness of other cultures. Pupils show a strong appreciation of the influences that shape their own cultural heritage. Informative visits to historical sites, theatres, art galleries and museums, all strongly foster their understanding. Pupils display a good knowledge of public figures and institutions.

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

- 4.6 Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils and their pastoral care are excellent, supporting fully their outstanding personal development in line with the school's aims. Pupils enjoy being part of this happy and caring community and the excellent care and guidance shown by all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, also support pupils' achievements effectively,
- 4.7 Small class sizes ensure that form teachers know their pupils very well. Staff throughout the school recognise that they have corporate responsibility for all pupils in their care and provide highly effective support. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, pupils were confident they have an adult to whom they can turn if needed and in pupil interviews said that they feel happy and safe in school.
- 4.8 The school has a comprehensive anti-bullying policy and pupils say that they are confident that any issues which might arise would be dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils behave well and are responsible members of the school community. They know that a high standard is expected, and are clear about the way sanctions operate, should they be necessary.
- 4.9 Health and safety arrangements are properly overseen by the governors, and risk assessments are detailed and thorough. The school has robust policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils, and all staff receive the necessary level and frequency of child protection training. The school has taken suitable action to guard against the risk of fire. Fire drills are held regularly and all alarms are tested appropriately. The school provides appropriately for pupils who are ill and suitably qualified first-aiders are on hand throughout the school. There is an appropriate plan to improve access for pupils with disabilities. The school keeps all necessary records of admission and attendance.
- 4.10 School meals are healthy and nutritious. Pupils' good understanding of the importance of healthy eating and the need for regular exercise is promoted regularly through science, PSHE and physical education.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The GEMS governance board provides effective care for the school and its development, and offers strong support in fulfilling the school's aims. The governors provide and maintain excellent accommodation and help to ensure that human and educational resources are used to the best advantage. Since the previous inspection governance has been strengthened and sub-committees deal effectively with matters relating to the curriculum, safeguarding, welfare health and safety, and finance.
- 5.2 Governors recognise the importance of developing close links with their schools and provide strong support and guidance for the recently appointed headteacher. GEMS head office colleagues and other headteachers within the group visit the school regularly making them fully familiar with all aspects of school life. In this way, governors have an effective oversight of the school and are well informed of the school's successes and achievements. Governors discharge their duties and responsibilities concerning child protection, safeguarding and the welfare health and safety of pupils effectively. The careful oversight of the systematic review, evaluation and updating of policies and procedures enables board members to monitor progress in those areas. They ensure that questions of suitability are scrupulously checked and that the central register is thoroughly maintained. They attend suitable training, especially in the important area of safeguarding.
- 5.3 In the pre-inspection questionnaires a small minority of parents who responded were not satisfied with the governance of the school. Inspection findings do not concur with these views.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.4 The overall quality of leadership and management of the school is good. Staff teamwork is of high quality and all staff are keen for their pupils to achieve well within the happy and friendly ethos that pervades the school. The assistant heads currently have the responsibility for monitoring the quality of achievement in each department as well as oversight of the curriculum and pastoral care. They work extremely hard and are fully committed to the successful achievement of the school's aims. However, this arrangement means that the school curriculum lacks oversight as a whole, thus hindering its effective monitoring.
- Teaching and learning have been strengthened by the recent appointment of coordinators for all subjects. The school has identified the need for co-ordinators to work with teachers to monitor consistency in teaching and in the assessment of pupils' progress, and ensure that best practice is shared. A revised strategic development plan, reflecting the views of the whole school community and identifying, prioritising, and costing areas for improvement has recently been implemented but it is too soon to judge its effectiveness.
- The school is efficiently run, with the day-to-day management working very well. The school's sense of community is further enhanced by the effective work of all non-teaching staff who are dedicated to the pupils' well-being. The school's premises are used to best advantage, with subject specific rooms contributing much to the quality of the education provided.

- 5.7 Procedures and policies throughout the school are clear and appropriately detailed. They are well implemented by staff and contribute successfully to the smooth running of daily school life. Staffing levels are good, and staff are well qualified. Support staff are deployed well and make an effective contribution to pupils' learning and welfare, particularly for those pupils with SEND. The school operates a suitable staff appraisal system and attendance at relevant courses ensures that all staff are suitably trained for their roles in meeting the needs of all children, in safeguarding and in welfare, health and safety.
- 5.8 Appropriate care is taken over all aspects of staff recruitment, such as checks on suitability and the recording of these checks, as well as ensuring effective staff recruitment, induction and training. Risk assessments are accurately and efficiently undertaken.

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

- Links with parents are strong throughout the school, fully supporting its aims. Responses to parent questionnaires indicate that most parents are highly supportive of the school. They are particularly pleased with the subjects that their children are taught, and with the information they receive on their progress. Parents are also highly appreciative of the nurturing care and guidance their children receive. Inspectors concur with these views. A small minority of parents indicated dissatisfaction with the governance of the school and feel that the amount of homework given is inappropriate. Inspection findings do not support these views.
- 5.10 All necessary information including policies and procedures is posted on the school website. Parents of present and prospective pupils are given good information about the school. The regular newsletters are informative and effectively showcase the many school activities. In addition, the fortnightly staff blogs provide parents with up-to-date, valuable and interesting information on school life.
- 5.11 Parents have good opportunities to be involved in their children's education through open days, parents' evening, concerts and assemblies. The newly formed Friends' Association provides excellent opportunities for further parental involvement through social and fundraising events and provides valuable practical support to the school.
- 5.12 Parents receive excellent feedback on their children's achievement and progress and are provided with many opportunities to speak to teachers. They receive two reports annually, one of which gives detailed information in each subject area. The other provides a summarised overview of their child's progress and their learning targets. Formal meetings are held twice a year to enable parents to discuss progress and welfare with relevant staff and to review their children's learning targets. Parents of children receiving learning support receive regular feedback on their children's progress. Parents of pupils in Reception and Year 6 are supported effectively in their children's transition to the next stage of their education.
- 5.13 The school has an open door policy and parents are encouraged to come in to school to discuss any concern. As a result, issues are dealt with swiftly and efficiently. There are clear procedures to deal with complaints and any concerns are handled sensitively in line with school policy.

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

6. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

6.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

This is a good setting which successfully achieves its aims to nurture a love of learning and to enable all children to experience opportunities which develop their individual skills and interests. Children make good progress in their learning. Their protection is assured and their needs are fully met due to successful partnerships between providers, parents and other agencies. The setting has the strong capacity to sustain improvement; since the previous inspection the school has extended the information given to parents about the curriculum and developed the outside learning environment.

6.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.2 Leadership and management are good, particularly where the welfare and safety of the children are concerned, as evidenced by the careful monitoring of well-planned safeguarding policies and arrangements. Effective links exist with parents/carers and other agencies and providers. Parents comment favourably on all aspects of provision and express appreciation for the strong channels of communication between school and home. The management team successfully employs critical self-analysis to identify areas for improvement, but leans toward short-term initiatives rather than long-term strategic development. All children have an equal opportunity to succeed through effectively applied policies underpinned by a good range of appropriate resources.

6.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.3 The quality of the provision is good. Appropriately qualified and caring staff deliver a well-balanced curriculum enthusiastically. Planning draws effectively on the interests and inputs of the children, but does not consistently identify the next steps in learning for individual children. Consequently, opportunities to move learning forward, especially for the more able, are sometimes lost. Relationships are strong and children's behaviour well managed. Every effort is made to commend and celebrate individual and group achievement in appropriate ways. The classrooms are spacious and well organised and the outdoor play space is well equipped with resources to stimulate imaginative and explorative play. Children of all ages are well supported by their key person who gives them a good understanding of the reasonable rules that give a pattern to daily life. Equipment is checked regularly to ensure a safe environment and risk assessments are undertaken efficiently.

6.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes for children are good. By the end of Reception most children, including those with SEND and EAL achieve good standards in all six areas of learning. Nursery children demonstrate an eager willingness to communicate their feelings and experiences and to persevere with physical challenges such as skipping and marching in time to the music. Reception children are proud to display their name-writing skills and to recognise and order numbers up to ten. They use computer programs confidently and are proficient when using a digital camera. Children show respect and consideration for each other by sharing, taking turns and expressing concern for each other's welfare and happiness. They listen carefully to, and absorb advice on, keeping safe, and demonstrate a clear understanding of the benefits of a healthy diet.

Section 2 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision

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, 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

Mrs Felicity Lawson Reporting Inspector

Mrs Clare-Anne Bruce Head of Juniors, ISA School

Mr Richard Cross Head, IAPS School

Ms Louise Savage Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector